College of
Professional Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Master's in Strategic Public Relations

CPS 6300: Public Relations and Public Affairs Capstone Research Project

3 Credits

Basic Information & Resources

Instructor: Professor Lawrence J. Parnell, M.B.A.

Lawrence J. Parnell, M.B.A. is an associate professor and director of the George Washington University Master's in Strategic Public Relations program, named the Best PR Education Program for 2015 by *PR Week.* He has served in this capacity since August of 2008. He also operates Parnell Communications, a boutique consulting firm specializing in communications strategy and executive training.

During his 32-year career in the private and public sector, he has worked in the government, corporate and consulting segments and on national political campaigns. He was recognized as **PR Professional of the Year** (2003) by *PR Week* and was named to the *PR News* **Hall of Fame in 2009**. He is an active member of the Page Society and the Public Relations Society of America.

Contact Information

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Course Details

Course Description and Overview

This course represents the culmination of your studies in the Strategic Public Relations (SPR) program in the Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM) of The George Washington University (GWU).

This is a self-directed course with only a few submissions. For this course, you are expected to select a topic of interest and an organization (subject to instructor approval) and develop a comprehensive strategic communications plan to help them address it.

Note: No duplication of issues/organizations is permitted within the class. In the case of duplicate submissions, the individual who first uploads the topic will retain it. Thus, it's a good idea to have a solid back-up idea.

The resulting plan should be of sufficient depth and detail to demonstrate your comprehension and the utilization of the material covered in your graduate program at GSPM/SPR to date. This plan will be submitted as your deliverable and will also be shared with your class colleagues. In short, we're looking for a client/issue that challenges you to research and strategize.

Faculty members will be available through regularly-scheduled meetings and upon request to discuss projects virtually.

Course Learning Objectives

Through research and preparation of a comprehensive, strategic communications plan, students will demonstrate a grasp of the fundamentals of strategic research and planning, advanced communications theory and tactical communications in a real-world situation.

In so doing, students will meet the following objectives:

1. Apply communications theory and strategic planning to a communications plan.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with state-of-the-art public relations strategies and tactics to achieve an organizational objective.
3. Design measurement strategies and budgets to demonstrate ROI of strategic communications activity.
4. Prepare a professional grade, client-ready communications plan.

Program Learning Objectives

Upon the completion of the Masters in SPR, students will have obtained an enhanced understanding and skills in:

1. Fundamentals of effective, strategic communications;
2. Best practices for writing, media relations and strategic communications planning and implementation;
3. Leadership in communications on a sound ethical and financial basis;
4. Managing the implementation of strategic communications strategies.

Required Text and Learning Materials

- Dainton, M., & Zelley, E. D. (2015). *Applying communication theory for professional life: a practical* introduction (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage publications.
  - ISBN: 978-1452276540
- Smith, R. D. (2012). *Strategic planning for public relations* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
  - ISBN: 978-0-415-50676-2
  - eBook: 978-0-203-08124-2

Students should also refer to texts from prior classes in the program to refresh themselves on core concepts.

Evaluation and Grading

This course will include the following types of assessment:

All assignments will be graded in terms of the quality of the writing, analysis, and content.

For any graded learning activity (i.e., assignments, discussions, etc.), you will be assigned a grade based upon the following distribution:

Assessments will contribute toward the student's grade based on the following chart:

Assignment Category	Weight
Class Participation • Attendance of and active participation in classes and other meetings • Submission of discussions and peer review	20%
Final Project • Topic selection • Proposal • Summaries of research • Research guide • Paper & presentation outline • Final paper & presentation [See Blackboard for details and rubric]	80%
Total	*100%*

Course Structure

In the first several weeks, you will be developing your ideas, writing a proposal, and starting the strategy or analysis process. In the middle of the course, you will be conducting primary and secondary research and developing your tactical recommendations. The remainder of the course will be devoted to completing the final project, including:

- Fully developing your strategic action plan. Submitting an outline in PPT format for feedback.
- Further developing your project into a final, written report with accompanying PPT presentation (as you would present it to a Board of Directors).
- Sharing your final PPT with peers, and then uploading both this PPT with the final written report as your end course deliverables.

Tentative Course Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar. Final dates and details will be found on the Blackboard course site.

Week	Learning Objectives	Readings	Lessons & Assignments
1	By the end of this week, you should be able to: • Identify and understand the important role of strategy in a PR campaign plan by (1) Reviewing the lessons on strategy learned in past coursework; (2) Completing the assigned readings; (3) Reviewing this week's lectures. • Identify and understand the course objectives. • Electing a suitable project topic and forming peer review teams.	*Strategic Planning for Public Relations, 4th ed, pages 1 - 17.* • *Introduction* *Applying Communication Theory for Professional Life, pages 7-12 and 215-225.* • *Chapter 1: Introduction to Communication Theory* • *Chapter 12: What Should a Communicator Do?*	Lesson 1.0: Instructor Introduction(s) Lesson 1.1: Strategy Review and Project Selection: Plan Book Lesson 1.2: Peer Review Discussion 1.1: Peer Review Teams Forum **Assignment 1.1: Topic Selection**
2	Begin investigating a real-world PR issue, its repercussions, and the organization response by: • Reviewing and understanding the components of an integrated strategic communications plan. • Completing the assigned readings. • Reviewing this week's lectures.	*Strategic Planning for Public Relations, 4th ed*, pages 19 - 89 • Step 1: Analyzing the Situation • Step 2: Analyzing the Organization • Step 3: Analyzing the Publics *Applying Communication Theory for Professional Life,* pages 193-212. • Chapter 11: Mass Communication	**Assignment 2.1: Proposal**
3	Conduct research into a real-world public relations challenge under short-term response conditions, evaluating its repercussions and mapping out a plan to move forward. Use peer-review process to fine-tune and build a robust plan by: • Completing the assigned readings. • Listening to the week's lectures. • Critiquing peer proposals. • Incorporating outside advice into your project to revise and refine a solution to, or an investigation of, a real-world problem.	*Strategic Planning for Public Relations, 4th ed*, pages 95-169. • Step 4: Establishing Goals and Objectives • Step 5: Formulating Action and Response Strategies *Applying Communication Theory for Professional Life*, pages 175-189. • Chapter 10: Mediated Communication	Lesson 3.1: Theory & Messaging Discussion 3.1: Sharing Your Proposal

Week	Learning Objectives	Readings	Lessons & Assignments
4	Use self-directed research to answer critical questions about an organizational issue to inform the development of a PR plan to address a real-world challenge by: • Completing the assigned readings. • Listening to the week's lectures. • Conducting secondary research and developing primary research tools.	*Strategic Planning for Public Relations, 4th ed*, pages 172-223 • Step 6: Developing the Message Strategy *Applying Communication Theory for Professional Life*, pages 117-132. • Chapter 7: Persuasion Recommended *Influence: Science and Practice* by Robert B. Cialdini	Lesson 4.1: Engaging Stakeholders Lesson 4.2: Primary and Secondary Research **Assignment 4.1: Summary of Secondary Research** **Assignment 4.2: Stakeholder Interview Questions**
5	Informed by research and feedback provided by peers on your outline, develop measurable goals for a PR plan and lay the groundwork for your final deliverables by: • Completing the assigned readings. • Listening to the week's lectures. • Conducting primary research.	[None]	**Assignment 5.1: Primary Research Guide**
6	• Incorporate outside advice to revise and refine a solution to, or an investigation of, a real-world problem.	[None]	Lesson 6.1: Measurement of Strategic Communication Campaigns **Assignment 6.1: Primary Research Summary** Discussion 6.1: Sharing Your Extended Outline PPT Forum **Assignment 6.2: Extended Outline in PPT Format**
7	[Week 7 is dedicated to drafting your comprehensive paper, which will be submitted in draft form for peer review feedback in Week 8 and revised for final submission in Week 10]	[None]	[None]
8	• Practice teamwork to resolve or investigate a real-world communications challenge under short-term response conditions.	[None]	Discussion 8.1: Draft Paper for Peer Review

Week	Learning Objectives	Readings	Lessons & Assignments
	• Review and understand extended outlines of others and offer constructive and tactful recommendations and thoughts. • Understand how to incorporate outside advice to revise and refine a solution to, or analysis of, a real-world problem. • Refine, edit, and organize your work into a professional final paper and presentation. • Assess and evaluate your fellow team members and identify strengths/weaknesses.		
9	• Polish presentation skills by engaging peers on an important issue for your organization. • Present a compelling case for action by your organization's Board.	[None]	*Class Presentations - TBD* Assignment 9.1: Final PPT
10	• Incorporate peer feedback on your campaign plans and finalize your recommendations. • Submit your final paper, demonstrating you are able to incorporate feedback and address peer and professional questions in a timely and organized manner.	[None]	*Class Presentations - TBD* Assignment 10.1: Final Paper Assignment 10.2: Self-Reflection

Expectations and Responsibilities

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site regularly throughout the semester to review weekly course content, view announcements, and submit assignments. Students can access the course site through GWU Blackboard.

Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or the IT Blackboard web page.

Please note that your access to this course on Blackboard will continue for one month after the course ends. If you wish to keep any work or materials, you must download or save them before the course closes.

Technology Requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate in this course. The minimum technology requirements for learning online at GW are outlined on the Technical Requirements and Support web page.

If you have any problems with the technology in this course, you can seek technological support from GW in a variety of ways, outlined on the IT Support website.

GW is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment that is accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The following links provide more information about the accessibility of technologies that may be used in this course:

- Blackboard accessibility
- Microsoft Office accessibility
- Adobe accessibility
- Vimeo accessibility
- YouTube accessibility
- VoiceThread accessibility
- Webex accessibility

If you have any issues regarding the accessibility of the technology used in this course, please contact your instructor. You may also explore the Disability Support Services website.

Technology Expectations

Regarding technology skills, you should be able to:

- Create documents and presentation slides
- Use a webcam and microphone
- Use a digital camera or scanner
- Upload files, including recordings and images
- Be open to learning and registering for new technologies
- Be flexible when technological glitches happen (which is a given)
- Seek technological help when necessary by contacting the Division of Information Technology

If you have any problems with the technology expectations in this course, please contact your instructor.

Getting Started

Everything you need to get started in the course is contained within the Blackboard course site. You can use the menu links on the left side panel to view different components. The content for each learning unit is divided into folders—one for each week. More unit folders will unlock as

weeks in the course progress. As well, sample papers from prior classes are posted her for your guidance.

Participation Policy

All students are expected to learn and contribute by being a positive participant in discussions, activities, presentations, and assignments. If you have an unavoidable conflict or become ill, in a way that will affect your participation in a given week, please notify your instructor immediately.

Grading Scale

Following is the grade scale for all CPS classes:

Grade	Range	Grade Standard
A	94-100	Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work.
A-	90-93	Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work.
B+	87-89	Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work.
B	83-86	Good work, but needs reworking and more effort.
B-	80-82	You've completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements.
C+	77-79	Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern.
C	73-76	Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern.
C-	70-72 (lowest grade to pass)	Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc.
F	Below 70	Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment.

Netiquette

Please observe the following rules of netiquette for communicating online:

- Remain professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.
- Remember that a real human being wrote each post and will read what you write in response. It is easy to misinterpret discussion posts. Let's give the benefit of the doubt.
- If you have a strong opinion on a topic, it is acceptable to express it as long as it is not phrased as an attack. Please be gracious with differing opinions.
- When upset, wait a day or two prior to posting. Messages posted (or emailed) in anger are often regretted later.

- Proofread and use the spell check tool when you type a post. It makes the post easier to read and helps your readers understand what you are saying.

Your instructor reserves the right to delete any post that is deemed inappropriate for the discussion forum, blog, or wiki without prior notification to the student. This includes any post containing language that is offensive, rude, profane, racist, or hateful. Posts that are seriously off-topic or serve no purpose other than to vent frustration will also be removed.

Credit Hour Policy

This is a **10-week, 3-credit course.** The majority of your time in this course will be **self-directed,** with the expectation that you communicate with the instructor and peers at strategic points throughout the semester. Though much of this course is self-directed, there are deadlines and check points you must reach. You should expect an average of **9-10 hours** of combined direct instruction and independent learning per week. More information about GWU's credit hour policy can be found at [the Office of the Provost's Policies](#) web page (Under: Assignment of Credit Hour Policy).

University Policies & Services

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university, including a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the [Office of Academic Integrity website](#), email ([rights@gwu.edu](#)), or call (202-994-6757).

Copyright Statement

Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, course materials, class discussions, and examinations are created for and expected to be used by class participants only. The recording and rebroadcasting of such material, by any means, is forbidden.

The Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. § 10) governs the rights attributed to owners of copyrighted work. Under certain circumstances, educational institutions may provide copies of copyrighted works to students. The copies may not be copied nor used for any other purpose besides private study, scholarship, or research. Users should not provide electronic copies of any materials provided on this course's Blackboard site to unauthorized users. If a user fails to comply with Fair Use restrictions, he/she may be held liable for copyright infringement. No further transmission or electronic distribution is permitted.

Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course

materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Please contact Disability Support Services if you need additional accommodations for accessing electronic course materials.

University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details see the current religious holiday policy on the Office of the Provost's Policies web page.

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services. They can be contacted by phone at 202-994-8250 or in person at Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information visit the Disability Support Services website.

Counseling and Psychological Services

GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information call 202-994-5300 or visit the Counseling and Psychological Services website.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in Gelman Library at 2130 H St NW in Suite 221 and they can be reached at 202-994-3765 or via email at gwriter@gwu.edu. You can schedule writing center appointments, both in-person or by phone, in advance. Daytime and evening hours are available. Check for this semester's hours at the writing center contact page. The Writing Center does offer Summer hours.

GWU Libraries

Off campus students have full access to all of the research resources, services, and assistance that the Library offers. The GW community has access to 500+ online subscription databases and to millions of items, electronic and print, in the library catalog.   Off-campus students even have additional privileges because the Library will FedEx print materials to your home. For more information visit the GW Libraries homepage.

Call the Ask Us desk at 202-994-6048 or contact someone at the library to answer any questions. For questions beyond "Do you have this book/article?" and "How do I login?" use the website mentioned to make a research consultation appointment with a librarian. Librarians are

there to guide students through any aspect of the research process, from selecting and narrowing a topic, crafting a research strategy to citation management.

Safety and Security

- **In an emergency**: call GWPD at 202-994-6111 or call 911
- **For situation-specific actions**: review the Emergency Response Handbook
- **In an active violence situation**: Get Out, Hide Out or Take Out
- **Stay informed**: review notification tools for staying informed during emergency and safety related situations