

# The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**M.P.S. in Political Management**  
Fall 2017

**Influencing the Media**  
PMGT 6464  
3 Credits

Monday/7:10-9:40pm  
Duques 362  
August 28 – Dec 11

## **BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

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### **Instructor: Parita Shah**

Parita has spent much of her professional career developing, implementing, and managing communications strategies and messaging campaigns for political organizations and government institutions, as well as corporate clients and non-profit organizations. She has worked on three presidential campaigns, served two presidential administrations as well as the mayor of Los Angeles, and held a senior position at a non-profit organization and a leading global public affairs firm. Until early 2017, Parita served in the Obama administration where she first served as Press Secretary at the U.S. Department of Commerce and later as Chief of Staff at the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

Ms. Shah holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from the University of Southern California and a Master of Public Administration degree from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

### **Contact Information**

Phone: 310-403-8765

Email Address: [pshah77@gmail.com](mailto:pshah77@gmail.com)

### **Communication**

Please contact me by e-mail, unless it is an emergency, in which case you may reach me on my mobile phone. I will respond within 24 hours to all student e-mails. If you would like to arrange an appointment to see me one-on-one, please e-mail me at least 48 hours in advance and we will arrange a meeting.

### **Blackboard Site**

A Blackboard website has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site throughout the semester, as Blackboard will be the primary venue for outside classroom communications. Students can access the site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu>. Tech support is available at 202-994-4948 or <http://helpdesk.gwu.edu>.

### **Academic Integrity**

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

### **Support for Students with Disabilities**

George Washington University’s Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS. Please also be sure to notify me of your disability, should you require accommodations. Additional information is available at [www.gwu.edu/~dss](http://www.gwu.edu/~dss).

### **In the Event of an Emergency or Crisis During Class**

If we experience some an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we must leave here, we will meet at the lobby level of the Media & Public Affairs Building (805 21st Street, NW) to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University’s operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu>.

### **Attendance Policy**

Attending class is required. Should you find yourself with a scheduling conflict, please contact me as soon as you are aware of the issue to let me know that you will absent, otherwise, it will be considered an unexcused absence and it will negatively count against your participation grade. Simply put, you must attend class to participate. If unexpected events cause a student to miss more than 3 classes, the instructor needs to be informed as to the nature of the absence and could reflect in the student’s final grade.

### **Course Evaluation**

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW’s online course evaluation system. **It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation.** Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting any of the following:

Dr. Michael Cohen  
Interim Director, Political Management Program  
[michaeldcohen@gwu.edu](mailto:michaeldcohen@gwu.edu) | 202-994-5512

Dr. Jack Prostko  
Associate Dean for Learning and Faculty Development  
College of Professional Studies  
[jackp@gwu.edu](mailto:jackp@gwu.edu) | 202-994-3592

Suzanne Farrand  
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM  
[sfarrand@gwu.edu](mailto:sfarrand@gwu.edu) | 202-994-9309

## **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND GSPM EXPECTATIONS**

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### **Political Management Program Objectives**

A Political Management degree prepares students to win campaigns for elective office and policy positions, and to do so in a manner that benefits democracy and society as well as their organization and clients.

In completing the degree, students will be able to:

1. Assess a political environment, develop a strategy to achieve specified goals, and execute that strategy;
2. Draw upon a repertoire of effective campaign communication skills;
3. Collect, evaluate, and incorporate empirical evidence to shape and optimize the strategy;
4. Find, engage, and motivate the right leaders, professionals, and citizens;
5. Recognize and work through recurring political dilemmas in a manner that upholds ethical standards and professional conduct.

### **Graduate School Expectations**

Students enrolled in a graduate program should take their academic responsibilities seriously and be prepared to meet the following expectations:

1. Utilize effective time management skills to complete and submit their assignments on their required due dates and times.
2. Have attained a mastery of written communication skills including proper sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and word usage.
3. Understand how to properly format in-text citations and references for resources and information integrated into their written assignments.

GSPM prepares students for careers in the professional political world. In politics, words and deadlines matter. Excellent written communication skills are essential for success. Every word used, whether it is in a television or radio ad, direct mail piece, social media, or a press release,

will be scrutinized. Similarly, deadlines are important. Election Day does not get postponed because a candidate and their campaign are not prepared. There are no “do-overs” because a direct mail piece did not arrive to its intended recipients until after the election was concluded. Students will be best positioned for success in the practical political world if they have developed and exercise excellent written communication and time management skills.

**THE COURSE**

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**Course Description and Overview**

Through analyzing media coverage of public officials, political campaigns, legislative battles, interest groups and public policy issues, students will learn how to formulate communications strategies and employ effective tactics to gain favorable news coverage and deal with crisis situations. *NOTE: We will have guest speakers throughout the semester who will share real life examples of the concepts we will learn throughout the semester. All speakers are tentative and will be announced prior to class. Speakers may appear in person or via video technology.*

**Course Learning Objectives**

By the end of the course, the students will learn written and verbal communications skills necessary to devise a public relations campaign on behalf of a candidate, client or cause. While this course will discuss strategy, we will also review the tactical, basic elements of written, verbal and digital/visual communications. Students will also learn how to develop and manage relationships with the media.

**Course Requirements**

Students are required to attend class, participate in regular class discussion and work on in-class group exercises. Students will be expected to do weekly readings and writing assignments, write a final project and take a final exam. Assignments are due by the next class and will be returned the following week.

**Evaluation and Grading**

Assignment	Description and Learning Objective(s)	Due Date	Weight
Written & Verbal Assignments	See Class Schedule	See Class Schedule	5% each for a total of 45%
Class Participation	Analysis, thoughtful contributions, ideas, reading	Ongoing throughout semester	10%
Final Project	To be discussed at the beginning of the semester	December 4	25%

Final Exam	Testing skills/knowledge learned	December 11	20%
TOTAL			100%

Following is the grade scale for all GSPM classes:

Grade	Grading 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	Satisfactory work, but needs reworking and more effort. Note that although not a failing grade, at the graduate level, anything below a "B" is viewed as unacceptable.
B- 80-82	You've completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all 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.

### Late Assignments

Please note that late assignments will not be eligible for an "A" grade. For each day an assignment is late, it will be marked down one grade (e.g., from a B to a B-). An assignment that is one full week late will be counted as an "F." If you believe you have a legitimate "emergency" that makes it so that you will be unable to complete an assignment on time, please notify me as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements.

### Required Text and Learning Materials

In most instances, you'll read approximately 3-5 chapters per week and reading may be supplemented with short articles or podcasts. Listed below are the 3 books we will use during the semester. If you don't already own it, you should also purchase the AP Stylebook. Various handouts in addition to these books will also be provided.

**Books:**

Peggy Noonan – *On Speaking Well*

Frank Luntz – *Words that Work*

Jay Heinrichs – *Thank you for Arguing*

AP Stylebook (Note: All assignments should follow AP guidelines)

**Tentative Course Calendar\***

\*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. Note: we will miss 2 days for the following University holidays - Labor Day and Columbus Day.

**Week 1: August 28**

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Welcome and Introductions

- Introductions and discussion about upcoming semester
- Syllabus and Course Overview
- Case study

Assignment: You are a Communications Director for a candidate, cause or organization. Please write a 1-page description including: whom you work for and why; and, a job description for that role with responsibilities and expectations. (Note: This role will carry throughout the semester)

Read: Andrews 2,4; Luntz 5; Heinrichs 6,18

**\*\*September 4 – LABOR DAY – NO CLASS\*\***

**Week 2: September 11**

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Developing the Narrative

- Discuss chosen candidate, issue or organization
- Examine politicians, organizations and issues to determine what the “narrative” is
- Bio vs. Narrative
- In class exercise on developing a narrative

Assignment: Write a narrative for your chosen candidate, cause or organization. It should be compelling and give the media a reason to care or write about it/him/her. Include with your narrative an elevator pitch that summarizes the narrative in 1-3 sentences max

Read: Luntz 1-3

### **Week 3: September 18**

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#### Developing an Effective Message

- Review elevator pitches
- Discuss elements of a good message
- Surveys, focus groups and other tools to determine what is a good message

Guest speaker: Ben Wakana, Executive Director, Patients for Affordable Drugs; Former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Read: Heinrichs 3, 4

Listen: FT podcast “How persuasion works in business, life and politics”

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/ft-alphachat/id448302257?mt=2&i=1000383368011>

### **Week 4: September 25**

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#### Developing an Effective Message Part II: Persuasion

- Discuss elements of a persuasive message; elements of a bad message
- Class exercise: Developing responses using message and persuasion
- Tools to convey messages: events, speeches

Assignment: Find an article or TV clip relating to your issue/candidate and describe if the message was persuasive (or not) and explain why. Write 3 – 5 talking points you (or your boss) would use to respond to the article/segment using persuasive messaging. *Note: These talking points will be used in the next class as you practice pitching and being interviewed with a media trainer.*

Read: Noonan “And So We Begin” section; Heinrichs 12, 14

### **Week 5: October 2**

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#### Message Delivery

- In class media training
- Discuss the skill of message delivery
- Examples of good and bad message delivery
- In class assignment: Practice pitching a reporter and/or being interviewed about your candidate/cause

Guest speaker: Jennifer Millerwise Dyck, Senior Communications Advisor at Walmart; formerly Senior VP at APCO Worldwide, Director of Communications at the CIA and Communications Director for Vice President Dick Cheney

**\*\*October 9 – COLUMBUS DAY – NO CLASS\*\***

## **Week 6: October 16**

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### Setting Communications Goals

- Discuss the elements of a good strategic plan
- What is a media audit?
- Gap Analysis vs. SWOT

Read: Luntz 6

## **Week 7: October 23**

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### What is News?

- Examine building blocks of news
- What does the media consider “news”
- Review stories and headlines to determine what is news

Assignment: Put yourselves in the shoes of a reporter pitching his/her editor on why a story they want to write is newsy. Take a topic/event/hook related to your issue/candidate and in 5-7 sentences make the case for the story to be published.

Read: Case Study on Fake News (to be distributed in class)

## **Week 8: October 30**

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### FAKE NEWS!!

- What is fake news? Is it a new phenomenon?
- Case study: The Birther Movement
- The role Fake News played in the 2016 election
- Media bias vs. Fake News

Guest speakers: Adrienne Elrod, frequent guest on cable news shows and former Senior Communications Advisor, Hillary for America; and, Christina Reynolds, Senior Vice President, Global Strategy Group and former Deputy Communications Director, Hillary for America

### Assignment:

- Find an article or TV clip that shows clear media bias. Identify where the bias is and how the reporter could have used different language to eliminate the bias.
- Invent a scenario in which you cause/politician is a victim of a fake news story and describe how the story evolved and what you would do to combat the story (be prepared to discuss in the next class)

## **Week 9: November 6**

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### Getting Noticed and Making News

- Review assignments
- Discuss basic written tools
- Samples of written tools

### Assignment:

- Write a media advisory for an event where you will be making news along with a press release announcing news you are seeking to make
- What is your ideal headline? How can you build an event and structure the announcement in a way that encourages media to attend and report? (keep visuals in mind)
- Draft 3 tweets you will send out

## **Week 10: November 13**

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### The Basics of Pitching

- How to talk to journalists: Pitches and Guidelines
- In class exercise to practice pitching (subject matter to be provided)

### Assignment:

- Develop two different pitches you intend to send via email to a print reporter and a TV reporter. Identify the reporter and outlet. Write the attention grabbing line, the pitch text and include the media advisory and press release from your previous assignment.

Read: Noonan “Soundbites and Soundbites II”

Guest Speaker: Thanos Dimadis, communications strategist and former foreign correspondent in Washington DC and Brussels; member of the executive board of the Foreign Press Foundation of the U.S. and of the International Organizations of Journalists

## **Week 11: November 20**

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### Visual & Social Communication

- How consumption of media has evolved
- How to effectively use social media to influence
- Preview of next class: - A n overview of the relationship between reporter and communications professional

### Assignment:

- Create a tweet, Facebook and Instagram post and/or story (including photos). The photos and language should be engaging and move your message.

- Create a short 20-second verbal pitch for a reporter and be ready to share in the next class.

### **Week 12: November 27**

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Understanding the Other Side of the Desk: Reporters  
(This class will be held offsite at the Axios offices)

Assignment: Put on your journalist hat and write a story that fits into your narrative keeping in mind what the reporter has seen and heard (press release, pitches, etc). Identify which outlet you write for and who the audience is.

### **Week 13: December 4**

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Crisis Communications and Damage Control

- Review guidelines on how to handle crisis/emergencies/scandals
- Review case studies
- In class exercise: Students will be provided with recent scandals and break into groups to come up with responses.

Guest speaker: Shannon Gilson, Director of Public Affairs, American Airlines; Former Communications Director at the FCC, Domestic Policy Communications at the White House and Deputy Director of Communications at the Department of Commerce

### **Week 14: December 11**

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**\*\*PAPERS DUE AND FINAL EXAM\*\***

Written exam: You will be given a scenario and be required to use multiple elements you learned throughout the semester to make news. (45 minutes)

Verbal exam: Working with the same scenario, you will develop and deliver a pitch for 2 to-be-determined news outlets. (15 minutes + presentation time)

Written exam II: You will answer questions derived from your reading throughout the semester.

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### **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.*