

# The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**M.P.S. in Strategic Public Relations**  
Fall 2018

**CPS 6300 – Capstone Research Project**  
3 credits

Location:  
Alexandria Graduate Education Center

## **BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

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### **Instructor:**

Lawrence J. Parnell (MBA)

Associate Professor and Program Director

George Washington University

Masters in Strategic Public Relations

Mr. Parnell is an Associate Professor and Director of the George Washington University Master's in Strategic Public Relations program in Washington, DC.

Previously, over a 35-year career in the private and public sector, he has held senior communications positions in consulting, on the client side and in politics and government. He has been at GW in his present capacity since August 2008.

### Honors:

While at E&Y he was named ***PR Professional of the Year by PR Week***, (2003). In December 2009, he was named to the ***PR News Hall of Fame***. In March 2015, the GW Master's in Strategic Public Relations was named ***the Best PR Education program*** of the year by *PR Week*.

### Publications:

He is the co-author of a new public relations textbook – *“Introduction to Strategic Public Relations – Digital, Global and Socially Responsible Communication* published by Sage Publishing. He has also contributed as a co-author of a chapter in a recent book (2017): *Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy* (Peter Lang publishing) which addresses the global social responsibility efforts of multinational companies and reputation management activity by the US Government.

### **Contact Information**

Phone Number: (703) 299 -4150 (0)

Email Address: [lparnell@gwu.edu](mailto:lparnell@gwu.edu)

Office hours by appointment

### **Communication/Access**

Professor Parnell is available for 2 hours prior to class for appointments or via drop in visits at the AGECE for advice on course selection, career planning and course work. Telephone appointments/updates are available on a mutually convenient basis.

### **Blackboard Site**

A Blackboard course site 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 of the classroom communications. Students can access the course site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu> . Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or [helpdesk.gwu.edu](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. 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://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>.

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

GW’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 to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Please notify your instructor if 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 have to leave here, we will meet at the stairway at entrance on the second floor of AGECE in order 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 weather policy and operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

### **Attendance Policy**

**The Capstone class is a self-directed course and meets approximately 4 times in the semester, culminating in a final, summary presentation of each student's Capstone project. Attendance at all 4 of these sessions is mandatory to get full credit for class participation.**

### **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 complete an evaluation. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting any of the following:

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

## **THE COURSE**

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### **Program Objectives**

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

1. Fundamentals of effective, strategic communications;
2. Best practices for writing, media relations, research and strategic communications planning and implementation;
3. Leadership in communications on a sound ethical and financial basis;
4. Working with management and staff/vendors to develop and manage the implementation of effective communications strategies.

### **Course Learning Objectives – Capstone Class**

Through the research and preparation of a comprehensive, strategic communications plan or in preparing a case study, the student will demonstrate their grasp of the fundamentals of strategic research and planning, advanced communications theory and tactical communications in a real-world situation.

In so doing, the student will meet the following objectives:

1. Apply communications theory and strategic planning to a communications plan or case study
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 results and ROI of strategic communications activity
4. Prepare a professional grade case study or “Board Room” ready communications plan

### **Graduate School Expectations:**

Students enrolled in a graduate program are expected to take their academic responsibilities seriously and meet the following expectations:

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

## Course Description and Overview

### Course overview:

This course represents the culmination of your studies in the Masters in Strategic Public Relations (SPR) program at The George Washington University (GWU). This is self-directed course with only a few class meetings. In person can be arranged with the professor upon request.

**NOTE: To participate in this class, students MUST have completed ALL 6 of the core courses required in the Master's program (PSPR 6201-6206) and be at or near the end of the SPR Master's program. Exceptions will be granted on a case-by-case basis only by the Professor/Program Director.**

In this course, you are expected to select a recent major SPR case or crisis and prepare an **in-depth case study** – detailing the background of the case, the communications strategy undertaken to manage it (in your assessment) and the resolution of the situation – positive or negative – by the company or organization. In the case, students are required to explore the communications theory or theories deployed and assess the success or failure of the strategy.

Students are also expected to assess the situation going forward and suggest “next steps” to sustain the progress made and/or recover from the damage the crisis caused to the organization.

In preparing the case, students must demonstrate critical thinking; research and analysis skills; an understanding of issues and crisis management and a grasp of strategic communications planning and execution. Students must also demonstrate advanced writing skills in their papers and show an understanding of communications theory and how it is applied in advanced communications planning.

Alternatively, and **only** with the prior approval of the Program Director, students may select a topic or issue of strong personal and career interest and develop a **comprehensive strategic communications program** to address it. A discussion of the applicable communications theory is required in this format as well.

Both options must be comprehensive, ready for implementation (e.g. “client/CEO ready”) and/or publication and reflect your course work in the SPR program to date. At the end of the semester, the project will be presented in a brief oral summary (10 minutes, including Q&A) to your colleagues and selected guests in the class.

Samples of previous outstanding papers of both types will be posted on Black Board for guidance.

During the semester, you **must** work with a peer in the class to refine and enhance your project. It is up to you to select that peer and make the arrangements to collaborate with and advise each other. The peer will be responsible for proof reading your paper; making suggestion for new areas to explore and or constructive comments on improving the paper. The name of your peer advisor should be noted on the cover page of the paper.

This is a requirement of the course. Please ask for assistance if you are not comfortable selecting a peer to work with during the course.

Paper Details:

The paper should be between 25-30 pages – not including the appendix or bibliography pages - and be double-spaced, using 12-point type. Students will be expected to adhere to AP style (Associated Press) in quotes and titles of subjects/sources and APA format for citations/footnotes.

Papers that do not adhere to these guidelines will be graded accordingly. Information and resources on proper citation procedures are noted in the class text/resources section at the end of this document.

All sources, including materials from online resources, must be noted and credited to the proper source. Quotes should be attributed to the speaker as well as note the source – unless it is directly from an in person interview the student personally conducted. If this is the case, the student should note that in the body of the paper (e.g. Personal Communication, Date - 2018)

Proper use of grammar and sentence structure will be monitored and graded accordingly. Failure to meet any of these standards will result in a reduced grade on your paper/case study.

Resources on citations and AP style:

Guide on Citations: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Guide on AP style: <https://www.apstylebook.com/>

**RUBRIC:**

**Evaluation and Grading**

**Your final paper will be graded on the depth of the research, the application of strategic public relations concepts (reflecting your course work during the program), critical thinking and the proper use of grammar, sentence structure and academic writing displayed in the paper.**

Specifically, the class /paper will be graded on a **100-point** scale (see corresponding grade chart in pages that follow) on the following basis:

**Class Participation and Preliminary activity: Total 20 points**

Participation – attendance at all formal classes and in person meetings/calls with the Professor (**5 pts**)

Submission of Outline and Final Draft for edit and comment by the Professor - (**5 pts**)

Presentation of the Final paper/project and Q&A with fellow students – (**10 pts**)

*(Note: Class participation points **cannot** be made up if you miss a class or the presentation.)*

**Final Paper – total 80 pts.**

10 points - Grammar, writing quality and structure/flow of the paper

10 points – Demonstrated knowledge and application of communications theory

20 points - Research depth and quality – primary and/or secondary – displayed in the paper.

15 points – Demonstrated application of prior course work in the SPR program and at GSPM

25 points – Critical thinking and analysis of the case and/or strategic communications plan

## Course Requirements

Capstone students are required to participate in all classes; complete Black Board exercises as assigned, meet all deadlines (e.g. for the project proposal, outline, final draft and final project) on time and in accordance with course standards. In addition, students are expected to meet with the instructor to gauge their progress and receive suggestions and ideas to complete the assignment.

**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. <u>Note that although not a failing grade, at the graduate level, anything below a "B" is viewed as unacceptable.</u>
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.

\*Please note that you may be penalized for late submission of assignment(s).

\*\* Capstone papers that receive a grade lower than a B will be returned to the student for revision.

**Text and Resources:**

1) **Applying Communications Theory for Professional Life: A Practical Introduction** – 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (2018) by Marianne Dainton; Sage Publishing; **ISBN13:** 978-1452276540; **ISBN10:** 1452276544 \*

Chapters 1, 7, 10, and 11

2. **“Introduction to Strategic Public Relations – Digital, Global and Socially Responsible Communication”** 1st edition, by Janis Teruggi Page, PhD and Lawrence J. Parnell. Sage Publishing 2018. ISBN #781506358031

Students are expected to read and cite these texts and other sources in the paper/project to demonstrate their grasp of the material and its application to the project/paper.

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