

The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

M.P.S. in Strategic Public Relations
Fall 2019

CPS 6300 – Capstone Research Project
3 credits

Location:
Arlington Graduate Education Center:
6th Floor

BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

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 (SPR) 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 Ernst & Young LLC, he was named ***PR Professional of the Year by PR Week***, (March 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, along with Dr. Janis Page, of a strategic public relations textbook – *Introduction to Strategic Public Relations – Digital, Global and Socially Responsible Communication* published by Sage Publishing (2018). This text is currently in use by 30 leading undergrad and grad programs in public relations. He has also contributed as a co-author of a chapter in *Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy* (Peter Lang publishing, 2017).

Contact Information

Phone Number: (703) 248-6213 (0)

Email Address: lparnell@gwu.edu

Office hours by appointment

Communication/Access

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

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Students are expected to check the site throughout the semester, as Blackboard will be the primary venue for all classroom communications -including class schedule and assignments. Students can access the course site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu> . Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or 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 <https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

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 <https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>.

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 AGEC 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 5 times in the semester, culminating in a final, summary presentation of each student's Capstone project. Attendance at all sessions is mandatory to get 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 | 202-994-3592

Suzanne Farrand
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM
sfarrand@gwu.edu | 202-994-9309

THE COURSE

Program Objectives

Upon the completion of the Master's 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. Developing and managing the implementation of strategic communications plans.

Course Learning Objectives – Capstone Class

Through research and preparation of a comprehensive, strategic communications plan or in preparing an in-depth case study, each student will demonstrate their grasp of the fundamentals of research and planning, advanced communications theory and strategic 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, tactics and budgets
3. Design measurement and evaluation strategies to demonstrate results and prove ROI
4. Prepare a professional grade case study or “client ready” communications plan

Graduate School Expectations:

Students enrolled in a graduate program at GW 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 the due dates.
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 Master's 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 meetings with the professor can be arranged upon request.

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

In this course, you can choose to complete either a case study or a comprehensive strategic PR plan.

For a **case study**, it must discuss a major SPR case or crisis detailing the background, communications strategies undertaken and the resolution of the situation – positive or negative – by the company or organization. Students are required to explore the communications theory or theories demonstrated in the case and to assess the success or failure of the strategy. Students are also expected to assess the current situation and suggest “next steps” to sustain the progress made and/or recover from the damage the crisis caused.

Alternatively, students may select a topic or issue of strong personal and career interest and develop a **strategic communications program**. A discussion of the applicable communications theory is required in this format as well.

Both options require the prior approval of the instructor, based on a proposal to be submitted by the student.

In either option, 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.

Both options must be comprehensive, ready for implementation (e.g. “client ready”) or publication and reflect all your course work in the SPR program.

At the end of the semester, the project is to be presented in a brief oral summary (10 minutes, including Q&A) to your colleagues and selected guests.

Samples of previous outstanding papers will be posted on Black Board for guidance. Students are strongly encouraged to review the examples, so they know what is expected.

During the semester, you **must** work with a peer in the class to refine and enhance your project and have them proofread it. A sign off on the final draft from your peer is required.

It is up to you to select a peer and make the arrangements to collaborate with and advise each other. The peer will be responsible for proof reading your paper; making suggestions 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 samples (e.g. news releases, op-eds or media lists) or the appendix or bibliography pages. The paper is to be double-spaced and use 14-point type. Students will be expected to adhere to AP style (Associated Press) in quotes and titles of subjects/sources and use APA format for all citations. (see link below)

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. The Gelman Library staff is available to assist you in the proper use of citations.

All sources, including materials from online resources, must be noted and credited to the proper source, (see link below.) Quotes should be attributed to the speaker as well as note the source – unless it is directly from an interview the student conducted. If this is the case, students should note this in the body of the paper (e.g. Personal Communication, Date - 2019)

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/>

Gelman Library Staff - visit Gelman Library site for assistance

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), demonstrated critical thinking and the proper use of grammar, sentence structure and academic writing 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 an Outline, Rough and Final Draft (3 pieces) for edit and comment by the Professor - (**5 pts**)

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

*(*Class participation points **cannot** be made up if you miss a class.)*

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

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In addition, all students must take and pass a comprehensive exam to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter covered in the program. This exam will consist of a 10 question, Pass/Fail test administered in the early weeks of the Capstone Class. If a student does not pass the exam, they will be given the opportunity to re-take the text one week later.

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:

- **Applying Communications Theory for Professional Life: A Practical Introduction – 4th Edition** (2018) by Marianne Dainton; Sage Publishing; **ISBN13:** 978-1452276540; **ISBN10:** 1452276544
 - Chapters 1 (pgs. 1-17) and 12 (pgs. 223-236)

- **Strategic Planning for Public Relations** (4th ed.). Smith, R. D. (2017). New York, NY: Routledge. **ISBN13** 978-1138282063
 - Steps 1-7 (pages 25-336)

- **Introduction to Strategic Public Relations – Digital, Global and Socially Responsible Communication**, Janis Teruggi Page, PhD and Lawrence J. Parnell, MBA. Sage Publishing 2018. **ISBN #781506358031**
 - Chapters 4 and 5 (pages 80-129)

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.

Copyright Statement

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