

# The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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

Fall Semester

**Advanced Writing for Communications**

**Professionals**

PSPR 6202

Wednesdays, 7:10 – 9:40 p.m.

Arlington Campus, Room 614

## **BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

Please note this course will be taught by two faculty members. Professor Lopez will teach the first half of class until she goes on maternity leave, at which time Professor Laslo will take over as primary instructor.

### **Instructors**

Lesley Lopez

(909) 709-7864

[lesleyjlopez@gmail.com](mailto:lesleyjlopez@gmail.com)

@LesleyJLopez

Matt Laslo

[matt@mattlaslo.com](mailto:matt@mattlaslo.com)

202.510.4331

@MattLaslo

### **Lesley Lopez**

Lesley Lopez is a communications professional with experience on Capitol Hill, campaigns, c-suites and newsrooms. She is currently the Chief Communications and Marketing Officer for Run for Something and represents District 39 in Maryland's General Assembly.

She served as the head of global communications for the US-China Business Council, the leading organization for American business in China, and publisher of the award-winning trade magazine China Business Review. Previously, Ms. Lopez served as Communications Director of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the group of 27 Hispanic Members of the House and Senate, dedicated to voicing issues of the Hispanic community in the United States and Puerto Rico. Ms. Lopez also worked as the Director of Surrogate Communication at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, where she collaborated with Obama for America to book media interviews for 100 high-profile surrogates. Prior to

her political career, Ms. Lopez was a journalist for nearly a decade, including stints with ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos, BBC, CNN, America's Most Wanted and Eurovision.

Ms. Lopez is also a National Volunteer Partner for Girl Scouts USA and has served on the national board of YWCA USA, one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the nation.

### **Matt Laslo**

Based on Capitol Hill, Matt Laslo is a reporter who has been covering campaigns and every aspect of federal policy since 2006. While he has filed stories for NPR and more than 40 of its affiliates, he has also written for Rolling Stone, The Atlantic, Campaigns and Elections Magazine, The Daily Beast, The Chattanooga Times Free Press, The Guardian, The Omaha World-Herald, VICE News, Washingtonian Magazine and WIRED, etc. Since 2009 he's sat on the board at the Regional Reporters Association where he helps represent the dwindling numbers of regional reporters based in Washington. In 2011 he graduated cum laude from The Johns Hopkins University MA in Government and Public Policy program. He now teaches there as adjunct political communications professor, as well as teaching journalism at Boston University and The University of Maryland. He can be found on social media platforms as @MattLaslo Matt is also the creator and host of Bills & Brews.

### **Communication**

Students can reach the instructor via email during business hours. When emailing the instructor, please write **PSPR 6202** in the subject line and use only [lesleylopez@gmail.com](mailto:lesleylopez@gmail.com). Please email Prof. Laslo at [matt@mattlaslo.com](mailto:matt@mattlaslo.com). Additionally, the instructor will be available before class each week to address any pending questions or concerns.

### **Blackboard Site**

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site each week for reading and information about assignments, as Blackboard will be the primary venue for outside classroom communications between instructors and students. 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. 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://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. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University's operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

### **Attendance Policy**

Attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss a class it is your responsibility to notify the instructor IN ADVANCE and make sure any assignments due that week reach the instructor on time to receive full credit. It is also the student's responsibility to get lecture notes from a classmate and complete the readings as assigned. Regardless of the reason for missing a class, you will not be able to make up missed class participation points.

### **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/all of the following:

Professor Lawrence Parnell  
Director, Strategic Public Relations Program  
[lparnell@gwu.edu](mailto:lparnell@gwu.edu) | 703-29- 4150

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**

### **Strategic Public Relations Program 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. Working with management and staff/vendors to develop and manage the implementation of effective communications strategies.

### **Course Overview**

In this course, we will examine the fundamentals of writing as the necessary foundation for professional communications, particularly in terms of digital communication. The course comprises two thematic sections: developing writing skills and public relations applications for writing. Through challenging assignments, copy editing exercises and rigorous practice, this course supports the student's achievement of program goals 1 and 2 (see above list).

### **Course Learning Objectives**

-Strengthening the writing process: developing skills for brainstorming, organizing structure, drafting, editing and revising.

-Cultivating skills for more effective expression: persuasive writing, understanding emerging digital mediums, using content to impact digital presence, and mastering rhetorical techniques.

### **Course Requirements**

- Laptops are permitted, though students are expected to only view course-related materials.
- **A notebook with lined, pull-out paper is required for in class writing.**
- Formatting matters. All work for this class should be typed, have 1" margins and use 12-point Times-Roman font, single-spaced. All press releases, speeches and op-eds must be formatted to fit the medium.
- Punctuality matters. Each class will begin promptly with a short writing exercise that counts toward the participation grade.
- When corresponding via email, please put include **PSPR 6202** in the subject line.
- Students must use Associated Press style. Please do not use footnote citations.
- Printed work is due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Late work will be marked down a grade for each class it is late. If a student will miss class, emailing an assignment is acceptable.
- Neatness, punctuation, and grammar count as a significant part of your grade. Any assignment with more than four grammatical errors will be returned with a failing grade. After the midterm, any assignment with more than two grammatical errors will be returned to the student without a grade.
- When a guest speaker visits, students will turn in a one-page essay about the speaker at the beginning of the following class. This is in lieu of in class writing.
- Each week, students will participate in a discussion topic on Blackboard. New topics will be posted after class each Wednesday night. To receive participation credit for the week, students must comment before the following class.

- Throughout the course, extra credit projects will be offered. Students can pitch extra credit topics as well. Students can earn extra credit up to 100% of the total grade.

### Evaluation and Grading

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
Weekly Assignments	On Going	35%
In Class and Online Participation	On Going	25%
Midterm	Oct. 3	15%
Final Project	Dec. 5	25%
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 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.

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

## Required Text and Learning Materials

Poynter ACES Certificate in Editing, must be completed by midnight Oct. 2. Purchase here: <http://www.newsu.org/courses/ACES-editing-certificate>. We have arranged for a discount for students. **I'm working to get a promo code so that you can get a discounted price.** Each student needs their own account at NewsU.org. During checkout, enter the code in the box for Promo Code and hit the "Apply to Order" button for the discount to take effect.

Recent version of the AP Style Guide, either digital or print copy

Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format by Thomas H. Bivins, either 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Please don't buy the expensive new version.

The Political Speechwriter's Companion: A Guide for Writers and Speakers by Robert Lehman

The Elements of Style (4th Edition) by William Strunk, E. B. White and Roger Angell

Additional grammar: The Classic Guide to Better Writing: Step-by-Step Techniques and Exercises to Write Simply, Clearly and Correctly by Rudolph Flesch and A.H. Lass

We will distribute additional handout materials, including articles, blogs, essays and research studies, in class and Blackboard on an ad hoc basis.

### 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.

#### **Aug. 28- Week 1: Intros and Skills Assessment**

In class: Why writing matters in the digital age and how can students use this course to be successful as content producers.

#### **Sept. 4- Week 2: Editing**

Required reading: Bivins, Chapter 1: Writing for Public Relations and Chapter 4: Choosing the Right Message and Medium

Refresher: Strunk and White, Chapter 1, 5

Flesch and Lass, Chapters 16-19

In class: Best practices

#### **Sept. 11- Week 3: Messaging and Press Releases**

Required reading: Bivins, Chapter 6: News Releases and Backgrounders

Refresher: Flesch and Lass, Chapters 7, 8 19-29

Strunk and White, Chapter 2-4

Assignment due: Write a press release based on the in class prompt.

In class: Deconstructing press releases

#### **Sept. 18- Week 4: Digital Storytelling Methods**

Reading: Bivins, Chapter 8: Controlled Publications, only Feature Writing section

Assignment due: Use provided press release to write a news article.  
In class: Guest speakers- digital communications panel

**Sept. 25- Week 5: Press Release Power Hour**

Assignment due: One-page paper on what you learned from guest speakers  
In class: Press release prompts

**Oct. 2- Week 6: Midterm**

Assignment will be announced at noon. Work must be submitted via email by midnight.  
Confirmation of ACES certificate must be emailed before midnight as well.

**Oct. 9- Week 7: Egos, Pathos, Logos**

Reading: Lehrman, Chapter 2 and 3  
Assignment due: Write a one-page assessment of two op-eds provided, based on the Lehrman reading.  
In class: Diagramming EPL to different audiences

**Oct. 16- Week 8: Op-eds**

Reading: Posted on Blackboard  
Assignment due: Write an op-ed or Medium post on the subject of your choice (700-1000 words).  
In class: Guest speaker

**Oct. 23- Week 9: Rhetorical devices and workshop**

Reading: Lehrman, Chapter 7  
Assignment due: One-page paper on what you learned from guest speaker and re-submit op-eds for extra credit.  
In class: Workshop

**Oct. 30- Week 10: Speeches I**

Reading: Lehrman, Chapters 6 and Appendix A  
Assignment due: Rework your op-ed into a 5-minute speech or video.  
In class: Analysis of recognizable speeches and types of speeches

**Nov. 6- Week 11: Speeches II/Monroe's Motivational Sequence (MMS)**

Lehrman, Chapter 5, 11-14  
Assignment due: Submit final project pitch  
In class: Diagramming and presenting MMS speeches

**Nov. 13- Week 12: Communications Plan**

Reading: Posted on Blackboard  
Assignment due: Edit and rewrite speech to last 10 minutes.  
In class: Case studies and prompts

**No class on Nov. 21 for Thanksgiving holiday**

**Nov. 27- Week 13: First round of final presentations**

**\*\*\*All extra credit due\*\*\***

**Dec. 4- Week 14: Final Project and Presentations Due**

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*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.*