

# The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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

Spring 2019 - Jan. 14 to April 29

### MEDIA RELATIONS IN A DIGITAL WORLD *New Tools, New Challenges, New Thinking*

PSPR 6204

3 credits

Thursdays 7:10–9:40 pm

Alexandria Campus

**Official Hashtag: #PSPR6204**

## BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

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### Instructor

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*, *USA Today*, *VICE News* and *Washingtonian Magazine*, among many other publications. 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. He has also taught political communications at Boston University (MA) and journalism at The University of Maryland (BA). He can be found on most every social media platform as [@MattLaslo](#) (please tell him if there's a new platform that he's not on!). You can read and listen to Matt's stories here: [Rolling Stone](#), [The Daily Beast](#), [The Guardian](#), [Countable](#), [The Atlantic](#), NPR. Matt is also the creator and host of [Bills & Brews](#).

### Getting in Touch

I am available by appointment, please reach out to schedule: Email:

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

Text/Cell: 202.510.4331

Twitter: [@mattlaslo](#)

### Copyright Statement

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### Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Students can access the course site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu>. Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or [helpdesk.gwu.edu](mailto: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>.

### University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

- 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.
- Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.
- Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

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

### Title IX: Confidentiality and Responsible Employee Statement

The George Washington University (GWU) and its faculty are committed to helping create a safe and open learning environment for all students. If you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. GWU strongly encourages all members of the community to take action, seek support and report incidents of sexual misconduct to the Title IX Office. Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, faculty members are required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office.

If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Mental Health Services through Colonial Health (counselors are available 24/7 at 202-994-5300 or you can make an appointment to see a counselor in person.). For more information about reporting options and resources at GWU and the community, please visit <https://haven.gwu.edu/>.

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### 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 **Starbucks** 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 operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

### Attendance Policy

Attendance during class is essential part of the course. If you need to miss a class for travel, illness or another reason, please notify the instructor via email prior to class. Habitually leaving after the break without a valid excuse/notice for your absence and/or arriving to the start of class will count as an unexcused absence. Arrangements to turn in assignments late must be made in advance.

### Out-of-Class/ Independent Learning Expectation

Over the course of the semester, students will spend at least 2 hours (100 minutes) per week in class. Required reading for the class meetings and written response papers or projects are expected to take up, on average, 7 hours (350 minutes) per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend 25 hours in instructional time and 87.5 hours preparing for class.

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## 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's 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 the instructor directly, either in person or via email. But if you feel the instructor isn't listening to your concerns, you can also contact any/all of the following:

- Professor Lawrence Parnell Director, Strategic Public Relations Program [lparnell@gwu.edu](mailto:lparnell@gwu.edu) | 703.299.4150
- 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

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### 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.

### 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 so as 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.

### Course Description and Overview

This course deconstructs the art and theory of media relations from the public relations and public affairs perspective. Students analyze the state of contemporary media – online and off – and its impact on commerce, politics and the human contract, examining key factors influencing reportorial and editorial coverage of business, government and not-for-profit interests. Special emphasis is on new and emerging digital platforms, the advent of the Internet, the rise of fake citizen journalism and the impact this all has on storytelling. Students will develop a strategic media relations campaign aimed at

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publicizing a product, service, idea or issue of an organization by using a variety of traditional and non-traditional digital publicity tools and techniques guided by sound messages and directed to sensible outcomes. These media relations strategies and tactics will help students to achieve organizational or client goals. Instructor will assign client with input from students (think of ideas early!).

### Course Learning Objectives

This course will engage students in discussions about the role media relations in advancing an organization's agenda. The course will focus on the principle components of an effective media relations strategy:

1. Develop a newsworthy story idea
2. Research media targets
3. Foster relationships with key journalists, podcasters and other influencers
4. Develop understanding of digital media and content development for media relations
5. Develop presentation skills to communicate ideas effectively with reporters and internal audiences
6. Create, implement and evaluate a media strategy

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- ✓ Apply new knowledge and skills in media relations and social media in a political, governmental, association or corporate setting
- ✓ Develop and evaluate media strategies, including digital media, in both proactive and reactive situations
- ✓ Write effective news releases and press kit materials (print & digital)
- ✓ Evaluate the ethical practices of journalists and communications professionals
- ✓ Evaluate social media tools and develop content
- ✓ Identify strategies for you to become an informed news consumer and more complete communications professional

### Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete the week's readings *prior to class*, and all assignments are due on date specified. Late assignments (those that are given to the instructor after the date specified) will be docked at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  letter grade for each 24-hour period it is not turned in or does not follow the stated submission format. In class exercises must also be completed in the time allotted.

As the fundamentals of media relations intertwine with social media, brand/issue presence on social media platforms are a key tactic for attracting the attention of journalists and the news cycle. That said, *we will frequently conduct an in class discussion and analysis of the week's winners and losers of social*

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*media*. Research will be conducted using Meltwater and other key tools as indicated by the instructor. This weekly assignment will be conducted in small groups that we will keep the entire semester for the purposes of this assignment. To get started, please:

1. Use the designated class time that will be allotted during the first class to get in your small group.
2. Review Shorty Award Winners Best Use of Social Media – [News Category](#)
3. Review Shorty Award Winners Best Use of Social Media – [Journalist Category](#)
4. Take a look at some of the [Best Uses of Social Media](#) in 2017. Also examine [6 Brilliant Social Media Campaigns to Shape Your 2017 Marketing Strategy](#)
5. Prepare to live tweet this segment of our class, using #PSPR6204 (can be private – just create a new account for the course), but your tweets may be shared by the professor

Actively engaging in class discussions and via social media monitoring and analysis is expected each week. You should draw upon the readings and current events to advance the conversation. Sharing new information and articles is helpful to further the discussion.

### Course Tools

We will leverage a number of tools throughout the semester, with the core tools being Sysomos and Meltwater. The SPR program has arranged for students in the program to have access to these services as part of their participation in the program. Students will have limited access to these services using their GW email address for their SPR course related work only.

#### Meltwater

Build your brand and drive growth by effectively engaging media influencers using the Meltwater News public relations software-as-a-service. Built on the Meltwater online intelligence platform, Meltwater News public relations software delivers superior global media monitoring and analytics with better targeted media outreach. Meltwater News customers maximize the reach and relevance of earned media coverage, while developing stronger media relations to deliver real business results.

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### Evaluation and Grading

Assignment	Learning Objective(s) Addressed	Due Date	Weight
Memo: Media Goals, Objectives and Key Messages	Develop a newsworthy story idea; develop understanding of social media and content development	Jan 24 (rough draft)  Jan 31 (final)	10%
BuzzFeed Community Presidents' Day Project, Rollout Plan ( <i>must use digital/social media tactics</i> ) & Results Report	Develop a newsworthy story idea; develop understanding of social media and content development	Feb. 21	10%
Memo: Media List Builder & Media Coverage Analysis	Foster relationships with key journalists and podcasters; research media targets; develop a newsworthy story idea	March 7	10%
Memo: Press Release & Op-Ed Including Rollout Plan ( <i>must use digital/social media tactics</i> )	Develop a newsworthy story idea; research media targets	March 14	10%
Memo: Journalist Backgrounder and Q&A Guide	Foster relationships with key journalists and podcasters; research media targets; develop a newsworthy story idea	March 28	10%
Final Project: Media Relations Briefing Book	Create, implement and evaluate media strategy	April 29	25%
Attendance, brief weekly reading write up and Participation (must regularly tweet using official Hashtag: #PSPR6204)	Working on teams	Ongoing	25%
<b>Total 100%</b>			

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**Following is the grade scale for all SPR classes:**

<b>Grade*</b>	<b>Grading Standard</b>
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

(Available on Amazon.com)

**Media Relations Handbook for Government, Associations, Nonprofits, and Elected Officials, 2e Kindle Edition** by [Bradford Fitch](#) (Author), [Jack Holt](#) (Editor) [Available Here](#)

**This Is How You Pitch: How To Kick Ass In Your First Years of PR** by [Ed Zitron](#) (Author), [Warren Ellis](#) (Introduction) [Available Here](#)

**The Media Training Bible: 101 Things You Absolutely, Positively Need To Know Before Your Next Interview** by [Brad Phillips](#) (Author) [Available Here](#)

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### Supplemental Text and Learning Materials

Select readings from academic papers and trade press will be posted via Blackboard (Electronic Reserve Section) one week prior to due date. Readings are subject to change.

**NOTE:** Readings and assignments should be completed on the day of class discussion listed on the course schedule below.

### Tentative Course Calendar\*

**\*The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. This class WILL EVOLVE WITH THE NEWS CYCLE, so buckle up and read.** Extra credit offered for students who write a 1-2 page paper on a new trend that's relevant to the week's reading; be prepared to present it to the class and turn it in prior to the class start time. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar.

Date	Topic/Learning Objective	Assignments & Readings
Jan. 17	<p><b>Class Introduction:</b> Getting to know one another.</p> <p><b>Media Relations Introduction:</b> What is media relations and how has the rise of digital/social media influenced it? Which medium sets the agenda? What is media bias? What's a win look like?</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 1, 3, 4</p>	<p><b>Assignment Due:</b> None.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 1, First Steps.</p> <p>The Media Training Bible, Section 1, Eight Ground Rules for Working With the Media.</p> <p><b>Supplemental Reading:</b> "State of the News Media 2017," Pew Research Center  <a href="http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/2017/">http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/2017/</a></p>
Jan. 24	<p><b>Tools of the Trade/Client Assignments</b></p> <p><b>Demos:</b> Meltwater</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 1, 2, 3</p>	<p><b>Assignment Due:</b> 1-2 page paper on reading assignment.</p> <p><b>Video:</b> About Meltwater  <a href="https://www.meltwater.com/ap/about/">https://www.meltwater.com/ap/about/</a></p> <p><b>Video:</b> About Sysomos <a href="https://sysomos.com/">https://sysomos.com/</a></p> <p><b>Supplemental Reading:</b> "State of the News Media 2017," Pew Research Center  <a href="http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/2017/">http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/2017/</a></p>

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Date	Topic/Learning Objective	Assignments & Readings
Jan. 31	<p><b>The Art of Storytelling:</b> Message Development &amp; Spokesperson Selection</p> <p><b>Client Assignments</b></p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 1, 3, 5, 6</p>	<p><b>Assignment Due:</b> 1-2 page paper on reading assignment.</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> The Media Training Bible, Section 2, Messages and Message Supports.</p> <p>Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 3, Developing a Message and Comms Plan &amp; Chapter 7, Dealing With the Principal.</p>
Feb. 7	<p><b>Media Relations Writing:</b> The art of messaging and building your toolbox – from press releases to corporate blogs; from fact sheets to video.</p> <p><b>Assignment Prep:</b> BuzzFeed Community Presidents' Day Project.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 1, 3, 5, 6</p>	<p><b>Assignment Due:</b> 1-2 pg. paper on reading AND 1-2 page paper on using Meltwater for your final project</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 4, Interacting with Reporters &amp; Chapter 5, Overview of the Media &amp; Chapter 6, Online Communication.</p>
Feb. 14	<p><b>ON DEADLINE, BuzzFeed Project</b></p> <p><b>GUEST LECTURE</b></p> <p><b>Pitching &amp; Media Training:</b> Building reporter lists, relationship building, blogs and social media.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 1, 2, 3, 6</p>	<p><b>Assignment Due:</b> BuzzFeed Community Presidents' Day Project. AND 1-2 pg. paper on reading</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> This is How You Pitch: How to Kick Ass in Your First Years of PR, Chapters 1-6.</p> <p>Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 4, Interacting With Reporters.</p>
Feb. 21	<p><b>Materials Matter:</b> Press release, press advisory, op-eds, LTEs</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 3, 4</p>	<p><b>Assignment Due:</b> Memo, List Builder and Media Coverage Analysis &amp; 1-2 pg. paper on reading</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 2, Tools of the Craft.</p>

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Date	Topic/Learning Objective	Assignments & Readings
Feb. 28	<b>Prepping for the Interview</b>  <b>Objectives:</b> 2, 3	<b>Assignment Due:</b> Memo, Press Release and Op-Ed including rollout plan (must use digital/social media tactics) & 1-2 pg. paper on reading  <b>Reading:</b> Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 8, Interview Preparation.  The Media Training Bible, Section 3, The Interview; Section 4, Answering Tough Questions; Section 5, Body Language and Attire Guides.  <b>Supplemental Reading:</b> Andrew Stanton, The Clues to a Great Story <a href="http://on.ted.com/Stanton">http://on.ted.com/Stanton</a>
March 7	<b>Media Interviews:</b> Framing an Issue and Dealing With Tough Questions  <b>Objectives:</b> 1, 3, 5	<b>Assignment Due:</b> 1-2 pg. paper on reading  <b>Reading:</b> The Media Training Bible, Section 6, The Different Media Formats; Section 8, Final Interview Preparation.
March 14	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	SPRING BREAK
March 21	<b>New Approaches - Podcast Outreach, Native Advertising, Paid Digital &amp; Fake News Awareness:</b> Integrating Within the Overall Strategy	<b>Assignment Due:</b> Memo, Journalist Backgrounder and Q&A Guide  <b>Reading:</b> TBD
March 28	<b>Visuals Matter:</b> Story-telling through photos, videos and infographics  <b>Objectives:</b> 3, 4	<b>Assignment Due:</b> 1-2 pg. paper on reading  <b>Reading:</b> Find an interesting article on a new trend – or write your own article on the new trend
April 4	<b>Crisis Communications:</b> Managing the News Cycle From Explosion to Anniversaries  <b>Objectives:</b> 3, 4, 5, 6	<b>Assignment:</b> 1-2 pg. paper on reading or article <b>Reading:</b> The Media Training Bible, Section 7, Crisis Communications: The 10 Truths of a Crisis.  Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 12, Crisis Communication in Public Affairs.
April 11	<b>Measurement Matters</b>  <b>Objectives:</b> 3, 4	<b>Assignment Due:</b> Final Project, Media Relations Briefing Book & 1-2 pg. paper on reading

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April  
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**Guest Panel, Speakers TBD**

**Assignment Due:** None. You're done! Relax.

**Reading:** None.

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## Assignments - General

Assignments must be submitted in memo format; 12- point font and 1” margins preferred. AP style for attribution (no in-text citations or footnotes to document sources). Please remember to spell check documents and proofread for grammar and punctuation. AP Stylebook will be used for all assignments.

## Assignments – Description

- 1. Memo: Media Goals, Objectives and Key Messages (10 points).** You will write a 3-page memo where you outline the research methodology (i.e., company digital/social media platforms, media coverage, Board and company executives, etc.) used to familiarize yourself with the client. You will then share your analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing the client and how media relations can play a lead role in addressing one of these opportunities and challenges. Goals, objectives and key messages should be included as part of your media relations plan.
- 2. BuzzFeed Community Presidents’ Day Project, Rollout Plan (must use digital/social media tactics) and Results Report (10 points).** Social news is a key element of any successful media relations strategy. To illustrate this point, you will write and post to BuzzFeed community. Your content and headline must be linked to President’s Day in some way (inspiration [here](#)). You must also target a specific audience—a group of people who care about news, politics or other related topics. In addition to the published post, you must develop a rollout plan leveraging digital/social media tactics. You will have a week to execute your rollout plan and must use the Buzzfeed analytics dashboard to share results.
- 3. Memo: Media List Builder & Media Coverage Analysis (10 points).** Using Meltwater, you will develop a media/influencer contact list that is appropriate for achieving the media goal and objectives you have outlined for your client. In addition, you will justify your selections by leveraging your prior analysis of media coverage for your client. In your justification, you will detail the strategic rationale underlying the choices made in building your list.
- 4. Memo: Press Release & Op-Ed Including Rollout Plan (must use digital/social media tactics) (10 points).** You will write a press release and op-ed on a key newsworthy topic for your client. Your ultimate objective is to obtain media coverage on the topic. Complete rollout plan addressing media targets, timing and use of digital/social tactics must be included.
- 5. Memo: Journalist Backgrounder and Q&A Guide (10 points).** Thinking in terms of your stated media goals and objectives, you will build dossiers for the top two influencers on your media list. The purpose being to prepare your client for the interview by anticipating questions, the likely flow of the interview, and the perspective of the journalist and their media outlet. Leveraging this background research, you will also create a Q&A briefing guide to go along with the dossiers. This guide will provide your client and spokespeople with insights in advance of the interview into which questions the individual may ask and the appropriate talking points in response.
- 6. Final Project: Media Relations Briefing Book (25 points).** The final project entails building a media relations briefing book, including a pitch list and influencer dossiers with key message points,

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personalized pitch e-mails for influencers, recommendations related to the implementation of the media relations campaign/newsworthy topic focus and relevant evaluation metrics.

**7. Attendance and Participation (must regularly tweet using official Hashtag: #PSPR6204) (25 points).**

Participation will be evaluated on weekly attendance, meaningful involvement in discussions, your weekly 1-2 page writing assignment that critically examines the week's reading assignment (these are really fluid and meant to ensure you did the reading and are also prepared to discuss it insightfully in class) and application of the principles from readings.

**NOTE:** You *cannot* make up points if you miss class (but consult with the professor if there's a death or illness, or if you're deathly ill – DO NOT COME TO CLASS IF YOU HAVE GERMS; WE DON'T WANT THEM AND YOU WON'T BE DOCKED POINTS BUT WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT AN EXTRA SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT. But ingest plenty of Vitamin C because only one absence is allowed for sickness, unless you have something more serious and then consult with the professor and we'll work with you).

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