

The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

M.P.S. in Strategic Public Relations

Spring Session

January 16 – April 30, 2018

Course Number PSPR 6210 PR

Government, Association, and

Nonprofit Communications

3 Credits

Wednesday 7:10 PM – 9:40 PM

GWU Alexandria Graduate Education Center

BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Instructor

Hon. Daniel B. Maffei

Member of Congress (2009-2011, 2013-2015)

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Communication

Appointments for individual meetings with me can be arranged via email. This is always the best way to communicate with me.

Academic Integrity

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and integrity 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 <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 an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location (huddle-in- place) until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave here, we will meet at the Irish Times 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: <https://campusadvisories.gwu.edu>.

Attendance Policy

Most of us have full-time jobs and these responsibilities will sometimes cause students to arrive late or miss class. We understand the realities of working in Washington. When this happens, *you must email the instructor in advance*. Multiple absences from class during the term may impact your 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/all of the following:

Prof. Lawrence Parnell
Program Director, Strategic Public Relations
lparnell@gwu.edu | 703-299-4150

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
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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.

Course Description and Overview

This course is designed to help communicators currently working - or hoping to work - in government agencies, political organizations, trade associations and nonprofit organizations understand better the changing media landscape. By studying the ways messages flow through today's brave new world of technologically-driven media, students will learn to become more effective in the planning and execution of their institution's communications.

The vast technological shift has revolutionized information flow to and from citizens. The news cycle has collapsed, and once widely consumed print publications and national networks have fractured into hundreds of potential information sources. Counterintuitively, such diversity of news sources has not meant most Americans receive more accurate or more in-depth reporting. Instead, in a predominantly profit-driven media, commercial incentives prompt information sources to strive for views, clicks, likes, retweets, and other marketable metrics, often to the detriment of accurate or thorough reporting. The vast majority of Americans get reporting that treats politics as a horserace and a contact sport, misunderstands many policy debates and twists the public's perception of organizations of all kinds.

By examining in-depth the challenges and opportunities this new media landscape presents, students will get a better understanding of how their institution's communications goals can be achieved.

Today a communications professional is expected create materials, manage the media, present ideas and produce PowerPoints. However, she must also understand the functions (and dysfunctions) of the media industrial complex enough to offer informed counsel as well. Typically, the smaller the organization, the more roles a single communicator is expected play.

It should be noted that the focus of this course is on government, association, and nonprofit communications in the United States. Although most of the concepts are transferable, communications in other countries can have particular challenges that will not be covered by this course.

Class participation is an important part of the course, starting with each student submitting (by email) a question based on the assigned readings by 4:00 PM the day of each class (including on the days a writing assignment is due). There will be three writing assignments, one of which will be a media plan for an organization or agency of the student's choosing. Students will also be responsible give a PowerPoint presentation in class based on their media plan. All papers are to be submitted by email in .pdf format.

Course Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

1. Compare and contrast the communications challenges inherent in various types of organizations from trade and professional associations and non-profits to government agencies and campaigns. We will examine their respective goals, audiences, and stakeholders.
2. Understand how an organization’s mission drives (or should drive) communications.
3. Develop and present strategic communications plans that help organizations achieve their goals, satisfy their stakeholders and pave the way to the future.
4. Examine the challenges facing trade association and non-profit communicators today, including with the decline of traditional media, and the new approaches and technologies developed to meet these challenges.
5. Enhance written, in-person and presentation communications skills.

Evaluation and Grading

Assignment	Learning Objective(s) Addressed	Due Date	Weight
First Paper	3-5 page paper comparing and contrasting two different organizations’ communications challenges. The organizations will be chosen by the students but should be of comparable sizes and budgets.	Feb. 13	20%
Second Paper	4-6 page paper analyzing a piece of false or seriously misleading information (“fake news”) that is perceived to be true by a substantial number of people. The paper will look into the source of the item, why it persists in the media, and whether efforts to debunk it have been successful or unsuccessful.	Mar. 20	20%
Communications Plan	Each student will choose one organization in the government or non-profit sphere and design a media strategy and present it as a written communications plan. We will go over the specific format expected in Class Nine.	Apr. 30	30%
Presentation of Media Plan	Each student will also give a unique oral presentation (utilizing PowerPoint slides) based on his or her communications plan.	Either . Apr. 17 or Apr. 24	10%
Discussion Questions	Before each class, each student will be expected to come up with one or two discussion questions based on the reading and submit it by email by 4:00 PM on the day of class.	Jan. 23, Jan. 30, Feb 6, Feb. 13, Feb. 20, Feb. 27, Mar. 6, Mar. 20, Mar. 27, Apr. 3	10%
Participation in class discussions	In a small “seminar” course, vibrant class participation is essential. Organization, clarity, and precision in the spoken and written word are expected of graduate level work but thorough documentation, keen observations and critical insight demonstrate superior effort.	Throughout the Semester	10%

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 not met 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).

Document Citations

Use the Chicago Style of Style for essays, citations and bibliographies. A sample of the style can be found on the GW website at: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/>.

PLEASE NOTE: You can lose points for failure to footnote accurately or for grammatical and spelling errors. This is a graduate course, and graduate level work requires that your work is proofread and presented in an acceptable manner.

Texts Needed for the Course

Some readings for this course consist of a single chapter of a books or an article and will be posted on Blackboard. However, due to copywrite laws, you will be responsible for obtaining your own access to the following texts:

Introduction to Strategic Public Relations: Digital, Global, and Socially Responsible Communication, Janis Teruggi Page and Lawrence J. Parnell (Sage Publications, 2019)

Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century: A Whole New Ballgame, Dennis W. Johnson (Taylor & Francis, 2011)

Overload: Finding the Truth in Today's Deluge of News, Bob Schieffer with H. Andrew Schwartz (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017)

Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade (Paperback edition), Robert Cialdini (Simon & Schuster, 2018)

The Content Trap: A Strategist's Guide to Digital Change, Bharat Anand (Random House, 2016)

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.*

Class #1 – January 16: Introduction

Introductions and class overview. Instructor will answer questions about the syllabus and course. Review major themes, course expectations, assignments. Overview of the subject matter.

Class #2 - January 23: Particular aspects of non-profit and trade associations

We will look at how non-profits such as 501(c)(3)s, charities, foundations, and trade associations are different in terms of their goals, intended audience for communications, and stakeholders. We will review challenges particular to these types of organizations in terms of communications resources and branding issues.

Readings:

Chapter 14 in Teruggi Page and Parnell

Chapters 6-7 in *Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media* (2nd Edition) by Kathy Bonk, Emily Tynes, Henry Griggs, and Phil Sparks (John Wiley & Sons, 2008)

Class #3 - January 30: Particular aspects of government offices communications

Assignment sheet for the first paper will be distributed

We will look at how government offices such as federal agencies, state and/or local authorities, and congressional offices are different in terms of their goals, intended audience for communications, and stakeholders. We will review challenges particular to these types of organizations in terms of communications resources and branding issues.

Readings:

Chapter 15 in Teruggi Page and Parnell

Chapter 4 in *Government Communication: Cases and Challenges*, Karen Sanders and Maria Jose Canel (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)

Class #4 - February 6: Particular aspects of advocacy groups & political campaigns

We will look at how advocacy organizations and political campaigns (including 501(c)(4)s and “super PACs”) are different in terms of their goals, intended audience for communications, communications timeline, and stakeholders. We will review challenges particular to these types of organizations in terms of communications resources and branding issues.

Readings:

Chapters 1-3 in Johnson

“NOW HERE THIS: The 9 Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications,” Kristen Wolf (FENTON Communications, 2009)

Class #5 - February 13: Media history & communications plans in a changing landscape

First Paper Due by 6:00 PM

Discussion of how student should go about choosing a government agency, trade association, non-profit organization or advocacy group for their final communications plan assignments

We will go through a brief history of mass media communications. We will examine the technological developments and economic factors that have brought about revolutionary change in how the media functions the last few decades. We will also look at approaches to formulating communications plans and their components, and how the changing media landscape has affected the process. We will discuss the challenges of trying to predict how the media will behave as your organization implements its plan.

Readings:

Chapter 4 in Schieffer

Chapter 2 in *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (Bloomsbury, 2010)

Parts 6-7 in *Calm Not Busy*, Kivi Leroux Miller (Bold and Bright Media, 2018)

American Society of Association Executives, various papers on communications plans

Class #6 - February 20: Why the mass media works the way it does

We will take a look at the “media industrial complex” and how a capitalist system effects so much of communications. In particular, we will examine incentives that professionals in the media receive for delivering certain kinds of information.

Readings:

Chapter 1 from *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events In America* (Vintage Books edition, 1992)

Chapters 7-20 in Schieffer

Chapter 4 in *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*, Robert W. McChesney (The New Press, 2013)

“The Case Against the Media, by the Media” in *New York Magazine*, July 25, 2016

Class #7 - February 27: Psychology of media consumption

Assignment sheet for the second paper will be distributed

We will discuss the psychological and neurological factors that determine how people choose to consume certain kinds of information. We will look at why people are more apt to be drawn to certain kinds of stories, why people might be turned off from others, and why it is so difficult to get someone to change their mind.

Readings:

Chapters 1-4 and 10 in Cialdini

Chapters 22 and 25 in *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*, Tim Wu (Vintage, 2016)

Chapter 13 in *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*, Drew Westen (PublicAffairs, 2008)

Chapter 2 in *What Americans Really Want ... Really: The Truth About Our Hopes, Dreams, and Fears*, Frank Luntz (2009)

Class #8 – March 6: Why “fake news” is so rampant and how to deal with it

“Fake news” - false or misleading information – is easily proliferated within the media. We will examine how this occurs and discuss various strategies and tactics for accomplishing your organization’s goals amidst fake news. We will also look at the growing cynicism towards expertise and consider the particular challenges that creates for many government or non-profit organizations.

Readings:

Chapters 6 in Schieffer

Chapter 1 in *Do Facts Matter? Information and Misinformation in American Politics*, Jennifer L. Hochschild and Katherine Levine Einstein (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015)

Chapter 4 in *The Death of Expertise*, Tom Nichols (Oxford University Press, 2017)

Class Does Not Meet – March 13

Class #9 – March 20: Taking on social media

Second Paper Due by 6:00 PM

Assignment sheet for the communications plan will be distributed

We will explore in depth the many opportunities and challenges presented by the Internet and, specifically, social media platforms such as Twitter, FaceBook and Snapchat. We will also examine some of the effects social media and the Internet are having on American society, such as deepening political polarization.

Readings:

“Top 4 Examples of Effective Social Media Strategies for Nonprofit Organizations,” by Neil Patel in *Inc.* (Jan. 26, 2016)

Chapter 3 from *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Cass R. Sunstein (2017)

“Has Social Media Been Weaponized?” by Steven Rosenbaum in *huffpost.com* (July 12, 2017)

Class #10 – March 27: Finding direct pathways to audiences

We will examine the tradeoffs in earned versus paid media components of a communications plan. We will look at various “outside-the-box” ways of reaching particular audiences and influencing public opinion. We will look at some examples of how political campaigns faced with having to motivate a particular demographic in a limited timeframe were able to do so through less conventional communications strategies.

“Why Nonprofits Should Invest More in Advertising,” by Dan Pallotta in *Harvard Business Review* (May 26, 2009)

“Paid Social Media Advertising: A Primer for Nonprofits,” by Britt Vogel in *WiredImpact.com* (Dec. 23, 2015)

Chapter 7 in *Inside Campaigns, Elections through the Eyes of Political Professionals* (Second Edition), William J Feltus, Kenneth M Goldstein, Matthew Dallek (CQ Press, 2019)

Chapter 10 in *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns* (Updated Version), Sasha Issenberg (Broadway Books, 2016)

Class #11 – April 3: Avoiding common pitfalls in communications plans

We will focus on some of the most common pitfalls that communications strategists fall into. Specifically, have stakeholders in the organization really been honest with themselves about what the true goals of the organization are and what audience they must reach with what message to achieve those goals? We will dissect the “content trap” issue and apply it to government and non-profit organizations. We will also examine issues in implementation of communications plans.

Readings:

Chapter 5 in Teruggi Page and Parnell

Part III of Anand

Class #12 – April 10: Ethics and values discussion

We will talk about the most frightening aspects of the contemporary media landscape and consider what will happen in the future. We will also discuss the ethics issues involved with using strategic communications techniques to accomplish organizational goals. In many cases, we will discuss whether the good ends of what an organization is trying to accomplish justifies ethically questionable means of manipulating people through mass media.

Readings:

Chapter 3 in Teruggi Page and Parnell

Chapters 13-14 in Cialdini

Chapter 5 in *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*, Chris Hedges (Nation Books, 2009)

Class #13 – April 17: Final Presentations (first half of class)

Half of the students will deliver their oral and PowerPoint presentations of their communications plans and take questions.

Class #14 – April 24: Final Presentations (second half of class)

The other half of the students will deliver their oral and PowerPoint presentations of their communications plans and take questions.

Final Written Media Plans Due – Tuesday, April 30, 2019 at noon

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