
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

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PSPR 6204 MEDIA RELATIONS IN THE NEW MEDIA WORLD

SPRING 2020: THURSDAYS, 7:10 – 9:40PM, ARLINGTON CAMPUS

COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructors:

Matt Laslo

(202) 510-4331; matt@mattlaslo.com; @mattlaslo

Michelle Leff Mermelstein, APR

(703) 928-3919; mleff@gwu.edu; @michelleleff

Instructor Bios:

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](#).

Michelle Leff Mermelstein, APR, has more than twenty years of communications experience focused in telecommunications and healthcare. Michelle is a respected media relations professional currently focusing on generating coverage for Sprint's wireless products with traditional and social media. She oversees Sprint's device presence and announcements at major industry conferences, including the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) and Consumer Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA) conferences. Before joining Sprint, Michelle was a senior account supervisor with Edelman's Washington, D.C. office and an account supervisor with Fleishman-Hillard's DC team. Michelle also served as a Public Affairs Associate for the American College of Physicians. Michelle earned a master's degree in political management from George Washington University and a bachelor's degree in political science and communications from American University in Washington, D.C.

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.

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. <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/>.

George Washington University Writing Center

The [GW Writing Center](#) offers a variety of resources to assist you with all aspects of writing, including choosing a topic, conducting research, constructing a sentence or paragraph, and framing an argument. Please use the Writing Center and their tools if you need writing support.

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.

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 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 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.

Course Description

The course will focus on the principle components of an effective media relations strategy:

1. Developing a newsworthy story idea.
2. Packaging it in the most attractive way.
3. Identifying and contacting the journalists in order to secure effective coverage.
4. Understanding the role social media plays in media relations.

Course Learning Objectives

The course goal is to provide you with the strategies, tools, and techniques for successful media relations in the new media world. The course will also explore media relations as a key tactic in an overall strategic communications program, covering both traditional and online/social media and applying classroom discussion and reading along with practical exercises.

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
- ✓ Understand the role of media relations in an overall communications plan.
- ✓ Develop and pitch a news story to the media with a greater chance of success.
- ✓ 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

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 instructors via email prior to class. Habitually leaving after the break without a valid excuse or 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 7 hours (350 minutes) per week (on average). Over the course of the semester, students will spend 25 hours in instructional time and 87.5 hours preparing for class.

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

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. Student feedback is carefully reviewed and often impacts future offerings of this course. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting the instructors directly, either in person or via email. You are also always welcome to contact other leaders at GW including:

- Professor Lawrence Parnell Director, Strategic Public Relations Program 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 sfarrand@gwu.edu | 202.994. 9309

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 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.

We will frequently conduct an in class discussion and analysis of the week's winners and losers of social and traditional media. You should draw upon the readings and current events to advance the conversation. Sharing new information and articles is helpful to further the discussion. Research will be conducted using Meltwater and other key tools as indicated by the instructors. This weekly assignment will be conducted in small groups that we will keep the entire semester for the purposes of this assignment.

During week one, the small groups will be asked to review the following:

- Shorty Award Winners Best Use of Social Media – [News Category](#)
- Shorty Award Winners Best Use of Social Media – [Journalist Category](#)
- [Best Uses of Social Media in 2017](#)
- [6 Brilliant Social Media Campaigns to Shape Your 2017 Marketing Strategy](#)

Actively engaging in class discussions and via social media monitoring and analysis is expected each week. Live tweeting is also encouraged using #PSPR6204. Tweets can be private and on an account created just for the course. They may be shared by the instructors.

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.

As a working knowledge of current events is vital for a media relations practitioner, students are expected to read a traditional newspaper – not just online – every day through the duration of the course. Please pay special attention to read the newspaper in full on the day the class will be meeting. Class discussions will often revolve around the news of the day.

Grading Descriptions

In this course, you will be given a series of individual assignments, in-class small group work and a final project. These assignments are designed to sharpen your research, writing, and media relations skills. They

will also enable you to identify trends in order to produce more effective media plans for your company, organization or clients.

All work for this class should be typed, double-spaced, and spell-checked, have one-inch margins, and use 12-point Times-Roman or Arial font. Use Associated Press style. Late work will be marked down one full grade for each day it is late. If you have extenuating circumstances, or need special accommodations, please speak with the facilitator before the due date. Otherwise, work is due on the assigned date. Neatness, punctuation, and grammar count as part of your grade. Coursework should be “client ready” in order to create a professional quality portfolio.

Course Grading & Assignments

Task	Learning Objective	Due Date	Weight
ASSIGNMENT 1: Memo: Media Goals, Objectives and Key Messages	Develop and newsworthy story idea, develop understanding of social media and content development	Jan. 23 (rough draft) Jan. 30 (final draft)	10%
ASSIGNMENT 2: BuzzFeed Community Presidents’ Day Project, Rollout Plan (using traditional and digital/social media tactics) & Results Report	Develop a newsworthy story idea; develop understanding of social media and content development	Feb. 20	10%
ASSIGNMENT 3: Memo: Media List Builder & Media Coverage Analysis	Foster relationships with key journalists and podcasters; research media targets; develop a newsworthy story idea	March 5	10%
ASSIGNMENT 4: Memo: Press Release & Op-Ed Including Rollout Plan (using both traditional and digital/social media tactics)	Develop a newsworthy story idea; research media targets	March 12	10%
ASSIGNMENT 5: Memo: Journalist Backgrounder and Q&A Guide	Foster relationships with key journalists and podcasters; research media targets; develop a newsworthy story idea	March 26	10%
Final Project: Media Relations Briefing Book	Create, implement and evaluate media strategy	April 23	25%
Attendance, brief weekly reading write up and participation	Working in collaborative teams	25%	
TOTAL			100%

SPR Grading Scale

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 Textbook and Materials

(All available on Amazon.com)

- Media Relations Handbook for Government, Association, Nonprofits and Elected Officials, 2e Kindle Edition: [Available Here](#)
- This is How You Pitch: How to Kick Ass in Your First Years of PR: [Available Here](#)
- On Deadline, Managing Media Relations, 5th Ed: [Available Here](#)
- The Media Training Bible: 101 Things You Absolutely, positively Need to Know Before Your Next Interview: [Available Here](#)
- *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*

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. Readings and assignments should be completed by the day of class discussion listed on the course calendar provided below.

Tentative Course Calendar: Instructors reserve the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. This class will evolve with the news cycle due to the constantly changing landscape of media relations. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar.

Class Date	Focus	Assignments & Readings Due
January 16	<p>Class introduction: Getting to know one another and begin our journey together</p> <p>Media Relations Intro: What is media relations and how has the rise of digital/social media influenced it? What is media bias? What does a “win” look like?</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 1 • The Media Training Bible, Section 1, Eight Ground Rules for Working with the Media. • Supplemental Reading: “State of the News Media 2017,” Pew Research Center http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/2017/
January 23	<p>Tools of the Trade</p> <p>Demos: Meltwater Demo</p>	<p>Assignment 1 DRAFT Due</p> <p>Reading: On Deadline, Chapter 2 nd 4</p> <p>Videos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About Meltwater https://www.meltwater.com/ap/about/ • About Sysomos https://sysomos.com/ <p>Supplemental Reading: “State of the News Media 2017,” Pew Research Center http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/2017/</p>
January 30	<p>The Art of Storytelling: Message Development & Spokesperson Selection</p> <p>Client Assignment</p>	<p>Assignment 1 FINAL Due</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Media Training Bible, Section 2 • Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 3 and 7
February 6	<p>Media Relations Writing: The art of messaging and building your toolbox – from press releases to corporate blogs; from fact sheets to video.</p>	<p>Reading: Media Relations Handbook: Chapter 4 - 6</p>
February 13	<p>Pitching & Media Training: Building reporter lists, relationship building, blogs and social media.</p> <p>Guest Lecture</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is How You Pitch: How to Kick Ass in Your First Years of PR, Chapters 1-6. • On Deadline, Chapter 5 • Pollard, C. (2016, March 29). How To Create An Excellent Media List. <i>Huffington Post</i>.

February 20	Materials Matter: Press release, press advisory, op-eds, LTEs	Assignment 2 Due Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 2 • On Deadline, Chapter 3
February 27	Prepping for the Interview	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 8, Interview Preparation. • The Media Training Bible: Section 3, 4 and 5 • Andrew Stanton, The Clues to a Great Story http://on.ted.com/Stanton
March 5	Media Interviews: Framing an Issue and Dealing With Tough Questions	Assignment 3 Due Reading: The Media Training Bible, Section 6 and 8
March 12	New Approaches - Podcast Outreach, Native Advertising, Paid Digital & Fake News Awareness: Integrating Within the Overall Strategy	Assignment 4 Due Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salzman, M. (2016, June 3). Media Relations: Still Important. <i>Forbes</i>. • Stein, L. (2016, January 11). How Public Relations Is Earning Its Place in 2016. <i>Advertising Age</i>. • Schneider, M. (2018, September 19). Report: PR pros outnumber journalists by a 6-to-1 ratio. <i>Ragan's PR Daily</i>.
March 19	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
March 26	Visuals Matter: Story-telling through photos, videos and infographics	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George, A. (2018, August 23). 4 Ways to Get Your Story Out as Newsrooms Are Shrinking. <i>Inc</i>. • Supa, D. W. (2014). A Qualitative Examination of the Impact of Social Media on Media Relations Practice (PDF), <i>Public Relations Journal</i>, 8(2).
April 2	Crisis Communications: Managing the News Cycle From Explosion to Anniversaries	Assignment 5 Due Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Demand, Chapter 9 • The Media Training Bible, Section 7 • Media Relations Handbook, Chapter 12
April 9	Measurement Matters	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Demand, Chapter 10 • Weiner, David. (2016). <i>Unleashing the Power of PR</i>. Chapter 3: “Measuring Public Relations Programming” (PDF) Jossey-Bass.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pozin, Ilya. (May 29, 2014). 5 Measurement for PR ROI. <i>Forbes</i>. • Werner, Mark. (11/20/2017). The Importance of Measurable Public Relations. <i>PR News</i>.
April 16	Guest Speaker/Panel	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matsa, K. E., & Shearer, E. (2018, September 10). News Use Across Social Media Platforms. Pew Research Center. • Garrett, M. (2018, January 9). No, press releases aren't dead—but sometimes there are better alternatives. <i>Muck Rack blog</i>.
April 23	Course Wrap-up	Final Paper Due

Assignments

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.

Attendance and Participation (25 points). Participation will be evaluated on weekly attendance, meaningful involvement in discussions and application of the principles from readings. Class participation cannot be made up in any way – you are expected to attend and participate.

- 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. 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.
- 3. Memo: Peeps Case Study (10 points).** Review the two articles regarding Peeps and Prince Harry:
 - Frederick, D. (2017, December 6). [Peeps invites Prince Harry to try his first toasted marshmallow](#). *PR Week*.
 - Weinberg, S. (2017, November 7). [Peeps Is Going to Extremes to Convince Prince Harry to Try S'Mores](#). *Delish*.

Thoroughly and succinctly answer the following in a memo:

- Identify the publics involved. Think broadly about any and all publics. How should they be prioritized?
- Provide your personal analysis of the solutions and communications strategy chosen for this case. Did they accomplish their goals? Why or why not?
- How would you have tackled this situation differently? Are there additional channels that could have been used or constituencies that could have been engaged? What more would you do if you were the PR lead for this project—what would your next steps be? Think creatively!

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.

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