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| M.P.S. in Strategic Public Relations |
| PSPR 6205 |

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| 3 Credits |



# Instructor Information

## Instructor

Karen Vahouny

## Contact Information

Phone Number: (703) 624-2674

Email Address: kvahouny@gmail.com

**Communication:**

Email is the fastest and best way to reach me, and I make it a priority to respond on the same day, if at all possible. Phone calls are fine, too. If you’d like to talk about something in more depth, I think it’s best to schedule a phone conversation. Please feel free to use my cellphone number, noted above, for calls. If you call and I don’t pick up, please leave a message and I’ll return your call as soon as possible.

# Course Details

## Course Description and Overview

This course will explore the fundamentals of business that can be applied to small, mid-size and large organizations, public relations agencies, and start-up consultancies. Students will learn how to effectively integrate communications/PR skills with a financial “lens” to real-world business situations. The course will include the disciplines of leadership, culture, marketing, economics, and finance and accounting, with an emphasis on financial planning and budgeting. The combination of the textbooks, relevant articles, in-class discussion, guest speakers(s), and practical assignments will give you a strong understanding of the challenges facing today’s business leaders and will prepare you for leadership positions in communications and public relations.

## Course Learning Objectives

As result of completing this course, students will be able to:

After completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand and interpret basic financial information
2. Learn about the structure and interrelationship of the financial reports used in business
3. Identify the key sections of an annual report, and review an annual report, investor conference call and financial news release.
4. Learn how financial indicators are used to identify trends
5. Understand how to develop an organizational/program budget
6. Understand the rationale for a business plan, and differentiate between a strategic plan and an operational plan, as well as their relationship to communication planning and activities
7. Understand the considerations for managing financial resources, from internal reporting to raising capital
8. Understand how public companies are valued and what metrics are used to evaluate private companies and public relations firms

The course will also address:

* The global business environment and economic issues that can have an impact on business success or failure
* Personal finance
* The challenges and opportunities of an entrepreneur
* Leadership and management
* The elements of successful communication plans and programs

**More About This Course**

There will be one individual assignment that will address a number of the learning objectives. There are two graded online discussions that will deal with practical, timely material, with students expected to post links, written summaries, and responses to other student posts. Three online quizzes will test and reinforce the lessons in the textbook. There will be a final written essay exam (assigned in advance) that will address key, broad concepts from the course.

The weekly WebEx classes will also require some advance preparation (such as developing questions or reviewing a video.) Ungraded online discussions will also support the class learning and be integrated into the WebEx chats. All of these are factored into the class participation grade.

Deadlines: It is extremely important that assignments are completed on time. If there is an emergency or crisis, please let me know and we’ll work out a revised schedule/deadline.

Under normal (non-emergency) circumstances, I may allow an assignment to be submitted up to one week after a due date – but only if a student has notified me prior to the deadline and I support the rationale for an extension. This late work, however, will receive a reduced grade. If an assignment is turned in past the deadline (with no advance notice) or if it is more than a week late (when pre-arranged with instructor), it will receive a 0. The ability to follow instructions and address all the requirements; organization; content; clarity; and writing quality, punctuation and grammar are all important considerations in grading. You’ll submit your work electronically, and I will provide feedback. Grades will be posted on Blackboard. We will use the APA style in written assignments.

## Strategic PR Program Learning 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.

## Required Text and Learning Materials

1. Finance for Non-Financial Managers SECOND EDITION (author: Gene Siciliano)

McGraw-Hill: copyright 2015

1. Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators (authors: Matthew W. Ragas and Ron Culp)

Palgrave Macmillan: copyright 2014

**Note:** If you don’t have a copy of the APA style guide, you should be sure to get one. It is:

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition. As noted earlier, that is the guide that will be used when preparing and grading written assignments.

## Supplemental Text and Learning Materials

 There will also be business articles/videos assigned throughout the semester (primarily in association with preparation for our class time.

## Evaluation and Grading

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| **Assignment** | **Learning Objective(s) Addressed** | **Due Date** | **Weight** |
| Individual ProjectThis will combine research and a PowerPoint presentation; it relates to an organizationalcrisis and its qualitative and quantitative impact. | 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 | Project 1: July 6 | 20% |
| Online discussion 1*Annual report*Online discussion 2*Current business news/event* | 1, 2, 3, 41-8 | Part 1: June 1Part 2:June 8Part 1:June 22Part 2:June 29 | 10%2.5%10%2.5% |
| Quizzes | 1-8 | June 15July 6July 20 | 15%(5% each) |
| Final exam (essay) | 1-8 | July 22 | 20% |
| Class participationWebEx chats: attendance, preparation and contributions; ungraded online discussions | 1-8 | Entire semester | 20% |
| Total |  |  | 100% |

# Tentative Course Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress and guest speaker scheduling. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar. Final dates and details will be found on the Blackboard course site.

**Note:** I will provide detailed instructions on the learning activities/assignments noted below, and all supporting information also will be posted on Blackboard. This includes links to articles, as well as any timely news or videos that may occur as the semester progresses. **All readings and graded assignments/quizzes are due before the start of the subsequent week’s WebEx class.** Again, there will also be ungraded online discussions and small assignments (such as watching a video) during the semester that will reinforce the textbooks/readings and will add value to the weekly WebEx chats.

**Class Date**

**Week 1 – May 18**

Topic and Content Covered: Class introduction

* Class structure and overview
* Learning activities and assignments

Reading due next week:

* Chapters 1 and 2 of the Siciliano textbook
* Foreword, Preface and Chapter 1 of the Ragas/Culp book

Assignments due next week:

* Set up Google alert on a public company
* Online discussion (ungraded) post – your introductions (*This will be on Blackboard Discussions. We’ll discuss during the June 1 WebEx class.*)

**Class Date**

**Week 2 – May 25**

Topic and Content Covered: Financial reporting overview

* Chapter highlights
* Personal finance introduction
* In-class discussion: Annual reports, Form 10-K reports, other financial reports
* Impact of regulation: Sarbanes Oxley and Reg FD

Reading due next week:

* Chapter 3 of Siciliano textbook
* Chapters 8 and 9 of Ragas/Culp book
* Warren Buffett article (*posted in Blackboard folder*)

Assignments due next week:

* Online (graded) discussion, part 1 (*This will be* *on Blackboard Discussions.*)
* Watch Kawasaki video (*This will be in Blackboard weekly class folder;* b*e prepared to discuss during WebEx class on June 1.*)

Assignment starting today:

* Individual assignment: Business crisis challenge: analysis and recommendations. Due date: July 6 before the start of class. (*Details will be posted and your assignment will be submitted in the Assignments section of Blackboard.*)

**Class Date**

**Week 3 – June 1**

Topic and Content Covered: Financial reporting/statements (part 2) and leadership’s role in financial communication

* Reading highlights
* Leadership communication: linkages between overall and financial communication
* CSR and video reports
* Themes/comments on our first (ungraded) online discussion/your introductions

Reading due next week:

* Chapters 4 and 5 (Siciliano)
* Chapter 6 (Ragas/Culp)
* Ford/Mulally article (*Posted in Blackboard* *folder.)*

Assignments due next week:

* Online discussion 1, part 2 (*respond to two student posts on Blackboard Discussions.*)
* Personal finance “tip” (*We will share/discuss during next week’s WebEx class.*)

**Class Date**

**Week 4 – June 8**

Topic and Content Covered: Leadership and business challenges; corporate reputation

* Reading highlights
* Corporate ethics/reputation
* More about Mulally/Ford
* Online discussion #1: themes and takeaways
* Your personal finance tips (and a personal budget “check-in”)

Reading due next week:

* Chapters 6 and 7 (Siciliano)
* Chapters 3 and 5 (Ragas/Culp)

Assignments due next week:

* Quiz #1 (Siciliano chapters 1-5 and assigned articles) (*This will be on Blackboard Tests section.)*
* Online discussion (ungraded post) – using the company you selected for your annual report. This discussion post will relate to this company’s most recent investor conference call. (*This will be on Blackboard discussions; we’ll discuss this during next week’s WebEx class.)*

**Class Date**

**Week 5 – June 15**

Topic and Content Covered: Financial communication tools and the opportunity for integrated messages

* Reading highlights
* Annual report discussion recap (observations from the online graded discussion post/responses)
* Investor conference call: best practices and thoughts from your ungraded online discussion
* Overview: other financial communication options and opportunities

Reading due next week:

* Chapters 9 (only pages 135-144) and 12 (Siciliano)
* Chapter 10 (Ragas/Culp)

Assignments due next week:

**•** Online discussion #2 (graded), part 1 (*on Blackboard Discussions.*)

• Review the most recent quarterly earnings release for the company you selected for your annual report/investor conference call online discussions. (*Be prepared to discuss during the June 29 WebEx chat.)*

**Class Date**

**Week 6 – June 22**

Topic and Content Covered: Communication and PR: measurement and evaluation

* Reading highlights; return on investment and budgeting
* Communication goal-setting, measurement and evaluation
* Earnings releases: best practices and thoughts/observations on the company you’d selected
* WebEx chat: Guest speaker

Reading due next week:

* Chapter 10 (Siciliano)

Assignments due next week:

* Online discussion #2, part 2 (*Respond to two student posts on Blackboard Discussions.*)
* *Remember to be prepared to discuss the most recent quarterly earnings release for the company you’d selected for the annual report/investor conference call online discussions; I’d assigned this on June 15, in order to give you some extra time to read/absorb.*

**Class Date**

**Week 7 – June 29**

Topic and Content Covered: The business of the business; why PR/communications professionals need to be well-versed in business and finance

* Reading highlights
* Opportunities for PR/communications professionals with Business 101 foundation
* Quarterly earnings releases (your thoughts from the company you’d selected for the online discussions)
* Investor relations: valuation, investor communications, IR best practices
* Final exam expectations/assignment

Reading due next week:

* Chapter 11 (Siciliano)
* Communication planning article (*In Blackboard folder; be prepared to discuss during next week’s WebEx chat.)*

Assignments due next week:

* Quiz 2: Siciliano chapters 6, 7, 9 (pages 135-144), and 12
* Individual Assignment: Business crisis challenge: Assigned on May 25, this is due by the start of class next week. (*You will* p*ost it in the Assignments section of Blackboard*.)

Assignment starting today:

• Final exam will be posted tomorrow morning. Due by 12 midnight on Thursday, July 22.

**Class Date**

**Week 8 – July 6**

Topic and Content Covered: Business planning and key success factors

* Reading highlights
* Strategic and business planning
* Communication/PR plans – best practices; discussion about the communication planning article
* Online assignment 2 debrief
* Introduction: Entrepreneurship team project

Reading due next week:

* Chapters 13 and 14 (Siciliano)
* SBA link (*In Blackboard folder; be prepared to discuss during next week’s WebEx chat.)*

Assignment due in two weeks (during July 20 class)

* Your entrepreneur team project sharing

**Class Date**

**Week 9 – July 13**

Topic and Content Covered: Building a successful business and raising capital

* Reading highlights
* Business success stories
* SBA article discussion
* Perspectives of an entrepreneur

Reading due next week: None

Assignments due next week:

* Quiz 3: Chapters 10, 11, 13 and 14 (Siciliano)
* Entrepreneurship team project sharing

Important: Your final exam is due next Thursday, July 23 (*You will post this in the Assignments section of Blackboard.)*

**Class Date**

**Week 10 – July 20**

Topic and Content Covered: Course summary

* Entrepreneurship team project
* Highlights: communication/PR planning and measurement; online discussion themes
* Course wrap-up

**FINAL EXAM**

* Due by midnight on Thursday, July 22

# Expectations and Responsibilities

## Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site regularly throughout the semester to review weekly course content, view announcements, and submit assignments. Students can access the course site through [GWU Blackboard](https://blackboard.gwu.edu/).

Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or the [IT Blackboard web page](https://it.gwu.edu/blackboard).

## Technology Requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate in this course. The minimum technology requirements for learning online at GW are outlined on the [Technical Requirements and Support](https://online.gwu.edu/technical-requirements-and-support) web page.

If you have any problems with the technology in this course, you can seek technological support from GW in a variety of ways, outlined on the [IT Support](https://it.gwu.edu/support) website.

GW is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment that is accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The following links provide more information about the accessibility of technologies that may be used in this course:

* [Blackboard accessibility](https://www.blackboard.com/blackboard-accessibility-commitment)
* [YouTube accessibility](https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/189278?hl=en)
* [Webex accessibility](https://help.webex.com/en-us/84har3/Cisco-Webex-Meetings-and-Cisco-Webex-Events-Accessibility-Features)

If you have any issues regarding the accessibility of the technology used in this course, please contact your instructor. You may also explore the [Disability Support Services](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/) website.

## Technology Expectations

Regarding technology skills, you should be able to:

* Create documents and presentation slides
* Use a webcam and microphone
* Upload files, including recordings and images
* Be open to learning for new technologies
* Be flexible when technological glitches happen (which is a given)
* Seek technological help when necessary by contacting the Division of Information Technology

If you have any problems with the technology expectations in this course, please contact your instructor.

## Getting Started

 Everything you need to get started in the course is contained within the Blackboard course site. You can use the menu links on the left side panel to view different components. I have customized the menu to make it easy for you to find what you need. The key sections are: Announcements, Syllabus, WebEx Room (where you’ll go for our weekly classes), Tests (for our three quizzes), Class Folders, and Assignments. The content for each learning unit is divided into Folders—one for each week. More unit folders will unlock as the course progresses.

## Participation Policy

All students are expected to learn and contribute by being a positive participant in discussions, activities, presentations, and assignments. If you have an unavoidable conflict or become ill, in a way that will affect your participation in a given week, please notify your instructor immediately. See the “More about this Course” section (earlier in the syllabus) for more details.

## Communication & Feedback

I use Announcements regularly; they are an important component of class learning. Some of the ways I use announcements: 1) as reminders 2) Q&As, incorporating questions I’ve received from students and sharing these with everyone 3) business news that I think you’ll find relevant and useful to our conversations and class time, as well as assignments and discussions .

I’ve also provided my contact information and communication philosophy on the first page of the syllabus.

## Grading Scale

Following is the grade scale for all CPS classes:

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| Grade | Range | Grade 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 | Good work, but needs reworking and more effort. |
| 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. |

## Netiquette

Please observe the following rules of netiquette for communicating online:

* Remain professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.
* Remember that a real human being wrote each post and will read what you write in response. It is easy to misinterpret discussion posts. Let’s give the benefit of the doubt.
* If you have a strong opinion on a topic, it is acceptable to express it as long as it is not phrased as an attack. Please be gracious with differing opinions.
* When upset, wait a day or two prior to posting. Messages posted (or emailed) in anger are often regretted later.
* Proofread and use the spell check tool when you type a post. It makes the post easier to read and helps your readers understand what you are saying.

Your instructor reserves the right to delete any post that is deemed inappropriate for the discussion forum, blog, or wiki without prior notification to the student. This includes any post containing language that is offensive, rude, profane, racist, or hateful. Posts that are seriously off-topic or serve no purpose other than to vent frustration will also be removed.

## Credit Hour Policy

For this **10-week, 3-credit course,** there will be an average of **11-12 hours** of combined direct instruction and independent learning per week.  More information about GWU’s credit hour policy can be found at [the Office of the Provost’s Policies](https://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines) web page (Under: Assignment of Credit Hour Policy).

# University Policies & Services

## Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university, including a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the [Office of Academic Integrity website](https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity), email (rights@gwu.edu), or call (202-994-6757).

## 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.

The Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. § 10) governs the rights attributed to owners of copyrighted work. Under certain circumstances, educational institutions may provide copies of copyrighted works to students. The copies may not be copied nor used for any other purpose besides private study, scholarship, or research. Users should not provide electronic copies of any materials provided on this course’s Blackboard site to unauthorized users. If a user fails to comply with Fair Use restrictions, he/she may be held liable for copyright infringement. No further transmission or electronic distribution is permitted.

## Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Please contact [Disability Support Services](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/) if you need additional accommodations for accessing electronic course materials.

## University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

Students must notify faculty as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls in the first three weeks of class, the student must inform the faculty within the first week of the semester that they are enrolled in the course.

To the greatest extent possible, faculty must continue to 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 must arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities.

For the full text of the policy and calendar of religious holidays, please see [the Office of the Provost’s Policies](https://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines) web page (Religious Holidays document).

## Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services.  They can be contacted by phone at 202-994-8250 or in person at Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information visit the [Disability Support Services](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/) website.

## Counseling and Psychological Services

GW’s Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information call 202-994-5300 or visit the [Counseling and Psychological Services](https://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services%20) website.

## The Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in Gelman Library at 2130 H St NW in Suite 221 and they can be reached at 202-994-3765 or via email at gwriter@gwu.edu.  You can [schedule writing center appointments](https://gwu.mywconline.com/), both in-person or by phone, in advance.  Daytime and evening hours are available. Check for this semester's hours at the [writing center contact page](https://writingcenter.gwu.edu/contact-us-0).  The Writing Center does offer Summer hours.

## GWU Libraries

Off campus students have full access to all of the research resources, services, and assistance that the Library offers.  The GW community has access to 500+ online subscription databases and to millions of items, electronic and print, in the library catalog.   Off-campus students even have additional privileges because the Library will FedEx print materials to your home. For more information visit the [GW Libraries](https://library.gwu.edu/) homepage.

Call the Ask Us desk at 202-994-6048 or [contact someone at the library](http://www.go.gwu.edu/ask) to answer any questions.  For questions beyond “Do you have this book/article?” and “How do I login?” use the website mentioned to make a research consultation appointment with a librarian.  Librarians are there to guide students through any aspect of the research process, from selecting and narrowing a topic, crafting a research strategy to citation management.

## Safety and Security

* **In an emergency**: call GWPD at 202-994-6111 or call 911
* **For situation-specific actions**: review the [Emergency Response Handbook](https://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook)
* **In an active violence situation**: [Get Out, Hide Out or Take Out](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpBT6tAa0dY&feature=youtu.be)
* **Stay informed**: review [notification tools for staying informed during emergency and safety related situations](https://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed)