

# College of Professional Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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## Instructor Information

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

#### PSPR 6205 – Fundamentals of Business and Finance for PR Professionals

Class: 10-week program on Tuesdays between April 5 to June 7 from 6:10 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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### Instructor

Karen Vahouny

### Contact Information

Phone Number: (703) 624-2674

Email Address:

[kvahouny@gmail.com](mailto:kvahouny@gmail.com) or [kvahouny@gwu.edu](mailto:kvahouny@gwu.edu)

### Communication:

Email is the fastest and best way to reach me, and I make it a priority to try respond on the same day. 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

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### Course Description and Overview

This course will explore the fundamentals of business that can be applied to small, mid-size and large organizations, from public to private and for-profit to non-profit; public relations/communication agencies; and start-ups. Students will learn how to effectively integrate communications skills with a financial "lens" to real-world business situations. The combination of the textbooks, relevant articles, in-class discussion, guest speakers, 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

The course will address various aspects of business and finance. The business focuses include leadership, culture, marketing, and economics. The financial topics include basic elements of accounting principles, and address financial reporting, the capital markets and financing, key performance indicators for financial management and competitive analysis. The course will also connect these topics to communication and public relations, such as the linkage between strategic and business planning to communication/PR planning and evaluation; organizational budgeting and program/event budgeting; and

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting and communication. In addition, personal finance will be addressed and, in particular, its connection to the three financial reports and to budgeting.

After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the three types of financial reports used by for-profit and non-profit organizations and identify how each is used; differentiate between revenues and profits.
2. Identify the main differences between an annual report and a Form 10K report, and assess the chairman/CEO's letter to shareholders based on a set of success factors.
3. Read a quarterly financial news release and listen to an investor conference call, and evaluate the success (in qualitative terms) of one company's performance/execution for both.
4. Identify key performance indicators that can apply to all types of organizations.
5. Identify the key components of a PR/communication plan and how each of the three evaluation/measurement criteria is used.
6. Determine qualitative and quantitative ways to evaluate the impact of a crisis/negative news on a public company.
7. Take a position on a current business issue/topic, using an outside source to build the case.
8. Differentiate between the purpose of a strategic plan, business plan and communication/PR plan.

### More About This Course

The graded material for the course includes: 1) one team project and presentation that will address a number of the learning objectives 2) 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 3) three online quizzes will test and reinforce the lessons in the finance textbook 4) a final written essay exam (assigned in advance) that will reflect and reinforce key, broad concepts from the course and textbooks/articles/videos 5) class participation grade will include both attendance (and active engagement) in our in-person classes and reflect your advance preparations. The participation grade also will reflect your participation in the ungraded Blackboard Discussions.

In addition, there will be some advance preparation (and outside readings/videos) for classes each week. This will also enrich the quality of our group and team interactions in class.

Deadlines: Deadlines are extremely important in our field, and I apply this standard to our class. The syllabus identifies all deadlines, and I use announcements and my weekly folders to include reminders and specific guidelines

Under normal (non-emergency) circumstances, if you need to request an extension, I may allow an assignment to be submitted up to one week after a due date – but only if you have 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. In the event of an emergency or crisis, please let me know when you can, and we'll work out a revised schedule/deadline.

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
2. 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 serves as a reference for preparing and grading written assignments.

## Supplemental Text and Learning Materials

There will also be readings and videos assigned throughout the semester (primarily preparation for our in-class time and/or online discussions).

## Evaluation and Grading

| Assignment   | Learning Objective(s) Addressed | Due Date            | Weight |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------|
| <u>Team</u><br>This will combine research and a PowerPoint presentation; it relates to an organizational problem or crisis and impact on reputation and results. | 1, 3, 4, 6                      | May 24              | 20%    |
| <u>Online discussion 1</u><br><i>Annual report</i>   | 1, 2, 4                         | Part 1:<br>April 19 | 10%    |
|  |                                 | Part 2:<br>April 26 | 2.5%   |
| <u>Online discussion 2</u><br><i>Current business news/event</i>   | 4, 7                            | Part 1:<br>May 10   | 10%    |
|  |                                 | Part 2:<br>May 17   | 2.5%   |

|  |                  |                           |                  |
|--|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| <u>Quizzes</u>   | 1-8              | May 3<br>May 24<br>June 7 | 15%<br>(5% each) |
| <u>Final exam (essay)</u>  | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 | June 9                    | 20%              |
| <u>Class participation</u><br>Attendance and active engagement; advance preparation; ungraded online discussions | 1-8              | Entire semester           | 20%              |
| Total  |                  |                           | 100%             |

## Tentative Course Schedule

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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. **Assigned readings /videos and graded activities 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. We will also address current business news and events.

\*\*\*You'll see below that in the Assignments Due Next Week section, I list Watch WebEx Recording each week. This will be a taped recording (a PowerPoint lecture, in a sense), which will supplement the assigned reading and include examples/current news to make it more interesting and bring the concepts to life. I'll be recording and posting these on Wednesday, so that I can also incorporate content and questions that have come up the night before in class. This will complement what we do in class, and it allows our in-person class time to be focused on discussions, team time, and interactions relating to the assignments, readings and activities, as opposed to lectures. Be sure to watch these each week before class. This will be really helpful in preparation for quizzes and the graded assignments, as well as our in-class time (and your ongoing learning and progress in business/finance).

I've organized the content below so that you can easily identify not only what we'll cover each week but also what's due the following week.

### Class Date

#### Week 1 – April 5

Topic and Content Covered: Class introduction

- Introductions
- Why business/finance fluency skills are important
- 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:

- \*\*\*Watch WebEx recording
- Set up Google alert on a public company
- Online discussion (ungraded) post – personal financial literacy
- Bring an example of a personal finance story/“lesson learned” to share during next week’s class

**Class Date**

**Week 2 – April 12**

Topic and Content Covered: Financial reporting overview

Learning Objectives Addressed: 1, 2

- Reading highlights
- Personal finance overview
- 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
- Jane Bryant Quinn article

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- Online (graded) discussion, part 1 on annual reports
- Watch Kawasaki video
- Read the bio of our guest speaker for next week; prepare at least one question to ask

Assignment starting today:

- Team Project: Business crisis challenge: analysis and recommendations. Due date: May 24.

**Class Date**

**Week 3 – April 19**

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

Learning Objectives Addressed: 1,2, 6

- Guest speaker
- Reading highlights
- Leadership communication: linkages between overall and financial communication
- CSR and video reports
- Wrap up: Themes from our first (ungraded) online discussion
- Optional: Teams can meet after class

Reading due next week:

- Chapters 4 and 5 (Siciliano)
- Chapter 6 (Ragas/Culp)

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- Online (graded) discussion 1, part 2 (*respond to one student post*)
- Watch and be prepared to discuss in class next week: Just Capital video
- Find and read the most recent quarterly financial news release (“earnings release”) for the company you selected for your annual report (graded) online discussion; be prepared to discuss in next week’s class.

**Class Date**

**Week 4 – April 26**

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

Learning Objectives Addressed: 1, 2

- Reading highlights
- Corporate ethics/reputation
- ESG/Just Capital
- Corporate earnings releases
- Wrap up: themes from online discussion #1/annual report CEO letter
- Optional: Teams can meet after class

Reading due next week:

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

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- 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.
- Online discussion (ungraded post) – read bio of our May10 guest speaker; post one question. I’ll be sending our guest speaker these questions after our May 3 class.

**Class Date**

**Week 5 – May 3**

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

Learning Objectives Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4

- Reading highlights
- Investor conference calls: best practices and takeaways from your ungraded online discussion
- Overview: other financial communication options and opportunities
- Optional: Teams can meet after class

Reading due next week:

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

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- Online (graded ) discussion #2 , part 1 on business issue/topic

**Class Date**

**Week 6 – May 10**

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

Learning Objectives Addressed: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8

- Guest speaker
- Reading highlights; return on investment and budgeting
- Investor relations: valuation, investor communications, IR best practices
- Optional: Teams can meet after class

Reading due next week:

- Chapter 10 (Siciliano)

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- Online (graded) discussion #2, part 2 (*Respond to one student post*)

**Class Date**

**Week 7 – May 17**

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

Learning Objectives Addressed: 3, 5, 6, 7, 8

- Reading highlights
- PR/communication planning, measurement and evaluation
- Opportunities for PR/communications professionals with Business 101 foundation
- Final exam expectations/assignment
- Optional: Teams can meet after class

Reading due next week:

- Chapter 11 (Siciliano)

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- Quiz 2: Siciliano chapters 6, 7, 9 (pages 135-144), and 12
- Team project presentation/post your team's PowerPoint in the Assignments section of Blackboard prior to the start of next week's class.

Final exam

- The final exam will be posted tomorrow morning. Due by 12 midnight on Thursday, June 9.

**Class Date**

**Week 8 – May 24**

Topic and Content Covered: Business planning and key success factors

Learning Objectives Addressed: 4, 5, 6, 8

- Team presentations
- Reading highlights
- Strategic and business planning
- Communication/PR plans: Best practices (and examples) relating to goal-setting, measurements and evaluation
- Online assignment 2 debrief
- Introduction: Entrepreneurship team project (ungraded/in-class on May 31 and June 7)

Reading due next week:

- Chapters 13 and 14 (Siciliano)
- SBA link (*In Blackboard folder; be prepared to discuss in next week's class*)

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- PR/communication plan/evaluation wrap-up: Choose one of the articles/videos (posted in folder) to read/watch and be ready to discuss in class next week

**Class Date**

**Week 9 – May 31**

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

Learning Objectives Addressed: 1, 3, 4, 6

- Reading highlights
- PR/communication plan/evaluation themes from article/video you selected
- Business success stories
- Entrepreneurship
- SBA business plan takeaways
- In-class time for entrepreneurship team project

Reading due next week: None

Assignments due next week:

- Watch WebEx recording
- Quiz 3: Chapters 10, 11, 13 and 14 (Siciliano)
- Entrepreneurship team project sharing

Important: Your final exam is due next Thursday, June 9

**Class Date**

**Week 10 – June 7**

Topic and Content Covered: Course summary

Learning Objectives Addressed: 1-8



- Entrepreneurship team project
- Course wrap-up
- Advice and future opportunities to build your business/finance acumen

Assignment due:

#### **FINAL EXAM**

- Due by midnight on Thursday, June 9

## Expectations and Responsibilities

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### **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](#).

Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or the [IT Blackboard web page](#).

Please note that your access to this course on Blackboard will continue for one month after the course ends. If you wish to keep any work or materials, you must download or save them before the course closes.

### **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](#) 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](#) 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](#)
- [YouTube accessibility](#)
- [Webex accessibility](#)

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](#) website.

### **Technology Expectations**

Regarding technology skills, you should be able to:

- Create documents and presentation slides
- Use a webcam and microphone

- Use a digital camera or scanner
- Upload files, including recordings and images
- Be open to learning and registering 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 panel to view the components. I've customized the menu to make it easy for you to find what you need. The sections are: Announcements; Syllabus; Discussions (for both graded and ungraded posts/responses); Tests (for our three quizzes); Class Folders; and Assignments (for the team project and final exam). The content for each learning unit is divided into folders: one for each week. More 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 and Feedback

I'll post announcements regularly via Blackboard's announcement feature throughout the course. I am a strong believer in using announcements; to me, they are an important component of class learning. There are some of the ways I use announcements: 1) reminders 2) Q&As, incorporating questions that I've received from students and sharing these, so everyone can benefit 3) business news that I think you'll find relevant and useful to our conversations and class time, as well as assignments and discussions

As far as communicating with you individually: I should respond within 24 hours (and I think you'll find that I'm usually very quick to respond to emails and texts).

As far as grading feedback: My goal is to provide feedback on the team assignment and the graded discussions about one week after the responses are due (I graded the original post and the response as one grade). My goal is to grade the final exams within four days from the deadline.

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

### Grading Scale

Following is the grade scale for all CPS classes:

| 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 Spellcheck tool when you type a post. It makes the post easier to read and helps your readers understand what you are saying.

It is CPS policy for instructors to have 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 **10 – 15 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](#) web page (Under: Assignment of Credit Hour Policy).

## University Policies & Services

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### 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](#), email ([rights@gwu.edu](mailto: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](#) 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](#) 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](#) 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](#) 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](mailto:gwriter@gwu.edu). You can [schedule writing center appointments](#), 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](#).

### **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](#) homepage.

Call the Ask Us desk at 202-994-6048 or [contact someone at the library](#) 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](#)
- In an active violence situation: [Get Out, Hide Out or Take Out](#)
- Stay informed: review [notification tools for staying informed during emergency and safety related situations](#)