

COMM 4054: PUBLIC RELATIONS CASE STUDIES

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"Public relations is the business of relationship management."
-- John Pavlik, Rutgers U.

"PR is a mix of journalism, psychology, and lawyering – it's an ever-changing and always interesting landscape." – Ronn Torossian, founder 5W Public Relations

Course Purpose

The purpose of this course is to answer the questions what is public relations and how does it work?

Contact Information

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*e-mail is the preferred method of contact, please allow for 24 hours before you receive an answer to any e-mail questions.

Twitter: @CayceMyers

Office Hours: 1:00 p.m. until 2:00 p.m. or by appointment

Virginia Tech policy says you MUST e-mail me from your vt.edu account. I CANNOT answer e-mails from non-VT accounts.

Course Information

Term: Fall 2015, 3 credits

Prerequisites: COMM 2044

Room and Time: Randolph Hall, Room 121. Note: This is a flipped course that requires you to regularly access and use the course's Canvas site

Canvas: We have a Canvas site that will actively be used during this semester

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursdays 1 p.m. until 2 p.m. or by appointment.

Final Exam Time: December 14, 2015 at 7:45 a.m. until 9:45 a.m. We will NOT use this exam time as there is no final exam for this class.

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Overview of this Course

Welcome to Public Relations Case Studies. This class considers public relations practice in real world application. You will systematically evaluate examples of how public relations practitioners have tried to enhance interactions with key publics to achieve organizational objectives.

- The goal of this class is to generate knowledge of effective principles of strategic public relations, and promote ethical approaches to reputation management. At the conclusion of this course you should be able to understand public relations theories and techniques to a variety of situations.

I want you to leave this course knowing more than when you started the semester. Processing is a major component of this course. By that I mean that I want you to critically think and analyze this material. This is not a course about rote memorization. Rather, this course is focused on applied critical thinking. Becoming an effective public relations practitioner requires you to understand issues not only from a communication perspective, but from all sides of potential publics. This includes understanding business, legal, social, and political consequences of all issues. At the end of this course you will be well-versed in this type of thinking and will become a better practitioner.

About Your Professor

Like all courses this course has an agenda. To understand a course on public relations cases it is important for you to know how your professor thinks about public relations. I view public relations as process of relationship management. I believe that public relations is a persuasive form of communication that has a goal of changing publics' attitudes and behaviors. I do not necessarily believe that public relations can solve all the problems of an organization. I also believe that when doing public relations for a client you must understand that client's communication, business, legal, and political needs. My goal for this class is to teach you how to examine a PR situation from multiple perspectives. I also want you to understand the legal and economic forces that influence the efficacy of public relations campaigns. At the end of this course I want you to see the volatility within public relations cases and how there are multiple possible strategies in PR practice. More than that I want you to feel confident in your own decision making in public relations practice.

My own research agenda is bifurcated between public relations history and law. My masters and Ph.D. focused on media history, specifically the development of public relations history in the United States. However, prior to my academic career I was a practicing trial attorney and have a J.D., which is general law degree required for practice, and a LL.M., which is a specialized post-doctoral law degree. My own theoretical identity is rooted in public relations theory as applied to historical development or legal issues. Methodologically my approach would be classified as qualitative. However, I try to avoid these general categories and prefer to say that I use historical and legal research methods.

In this class you are free to disagree with me, the readings, or other students. My only rule is that you support what you have to say with evidence. Well-reasoned criticisms are useful to craft good PR campaigns. By critically assessing these cases you will know what you believe and how to approach your future careers as PR practitioners.

Course Objectives and Assessment Alignment

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By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. To recognize and identify management, communication and public relations theory and systems, including how public relations fits into organizational structures
2. To analyze the efficacy of public relations campaigns
3. To construct a public relations audit that addresses strategic message development and structure in appropriate ways for specific and diverse audiences
4. To describe real life public relations problems through the study and development of in-depth case studies
5. To formulate solutions for ethical and legal public relations scenarios
6. To demonstrate effective communication skills through writing and analysis of PR cases

These course objectives are measured by various assessments. Here is how the assessments link with each course objective:

- Daily quizzes over course content help achieve course objective 1.
 - Fifty word response papers achieve course objectives 2, 4, 5, and 6.
 - Tests in this course achieve course objectives 1, 2, 5, and 6.
 - The final group project and presentation achieves course objectives 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.
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Required Readings

Swann, P. (2014). *Cases in Public Relations Management: The Rise of Social Media and Activism* (2nd edition) New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-51771-3.

Gower, K. (2008). *Legal and Ethical Considerations for Public Relations* (2nd edition) Long Grove Ill.: Waveland Press. ISBN: 978-1-577-66554-0.

Hayes, S. (2002). *Finance for Managers*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press. ISBN: 978-1-57851-876-0.

There will be articles and book chapters that we will read during the semester. All of them are available to students at the Virginia Tech library either online or in hard copy. You will be responsible for obtaining these items prior to class. The library website is <http://www.lib.vt.edu>.

Grading

The grade from this course will come from three components totaling 2000 points:

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1) Quiz each reading	300 points
a. 15 points per quiz on readings (20 x 15=300)	
2) Half page responses to class questions	400 points
50 points per each assignment (50 x 8=400)	
3) Test 1 (100 x 2=200)	200 points
4) Test 2 (100 x 2=200)	200 points
5) Test 3 (100 x 2=200)	200 points
6) Group Case Study Paper (300 x 1=300)	300 points
7) Group Case Study Presentation (100 x 2=200)	200 points
8) Peer Assessment Case Study (100 x 2=200)	200 points

2000 Total Points

2000 potential earned points minus Unexcused Absences (10 points per class)= Final Grade

Note: There are **no** bonus points for this class. Because of this it is very important that you maximize the points you can earn in this class. I also will not give tests early unless you have a legitimate reason for missing the assigned date for the test.

Points and Letter Grades

1860-2000	A	1540-1599	C+
1800-1859	A-	1460-1539	C
1740-1799	B+	1400-1459	C-
1660-1739	B	1399 or Below	F
1600-1659	B-		

Note that there are no D's given in this class. To pass this class you need at least 1400 points.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE INSTRUCTOR: All students are welcome and encouraged to communicate with me on issues relating to the course; however, for purely informational questions (e.g. deadlines) students should first, consult the course's Canvas site, the syllabus, and only third, contact me. In addition, when communicating with me via email please allow 24 hours for a return email, especially on weekends.

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SYLLABUS CHANGE: The syllabus is subject to change by the instructor in the event of extenuating circumstances. All changes will be announced in class and provided to students on the class Canvas site.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: All students are expected to attend class regularly and promptly. Class attendance and participation are essential to developing the depth of knowledge and skill necessary for you to become a PR practitioner and scholar of communications. Students who know they will be late to class or leave early need to let me know ahead of time. If you have not let me know about your situation ahead of time you will lose 10 points for each class missed and for each class in which the student arrives more than 10 minutes late or leave more than 10 minutes before the end of class.

There is a group project that counts for a major portion of your grade. You need to look at your group under the Canvas site's people tab and look at your group assignments under the collaborations tab on the Canvas site. Each person is expected to contribute significantly to this group project. Failure to do so will result in a lower grade for non-participatory group members.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: Excused absences are given to students who legitimately cannot come to class. This includes, but is not limited to, illness, death in the family, medical emergency, job interviews, or legitimate school sanctioned activities (e.g. away games for varsity sports). You need to let me know what your situation is before you miss the class. I will not give an excused absence for certain types of events. These include, but are not limited to, students who need to meet with advisors, work on other projects for other classes, go on vacations, leave early for breaks, or attend non-essential functions (e.g. friend's birthday party/away games as a spectator).

Students who will be missing a large portion of class (more than two consecutive class meetings) and want to receive excused status for these absences should contact the Dean of Students (http://www.dos.vt.edu/student_advocacy/) to obtain an "absence verification note." The absence verification note will then be presented to the instructor by the Dean of Students via the instructor's Dean.

LATE WORK/MAKE-UP WORK: Submitting any of the assignments late will result in a reduced grade, 20 points per day late, unless permission has been granted by the professor prior to the assignment's due date. The final project must be turned in on time without exception. Failure to do so will result in an automatic F for the course.

Tests may be made up ONLY if the student misses the test day for a legitimate excuse. Legitimate excused absences are detailed in the section on absences. Missing a test day for an unexcused absence will result in a zero on the test.

The faculty handbook under RULE 9.6.3 Final Examinations states that:

A student with conflicting examinations or with more than two examinations within 24 hours may reschedule an examination with permission of the student's college dean at least 10 days before the beginning of the examination period and by arrangement with the appropriate instructor.

You should note both that this rule only applies to final exams, not tests, and that there is specific protocol to reschedule a final exam. I will NOT reschedule a regular test date because of conflicting assignments, nor will I

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reschedule a final exam unless these conditions outlined in RULE 9.6.3 are met. Because we do not have a final exam and are not using the final exam period for presentations RULE 9.6.3 will not affect any of you.

Do not ask me to reschedule due dates for any assignments because of conflicts with other due dates in other classes. The only exception to this is policy is RULE 9.6.3.

RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC HOLIDAYS: Students are permitted to miss class due to religious or ethnic holidays. The university has created an established list of acceptable religious and ethnic holidays (see https://www.registrar.vt.edu/dates_deadlines/religious_ethnic/). If you need to miss a class due to a religious or ethnic holiday that is not on the approved list, please consult with the instructor in advance of the holiday.

DISABILITIES: If you are in need of special accommodations due to a disability, as recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD; <http://www.ssd.vt.edu/>). In addition, if you need adaptations or accommodations because of a disability (e.g., learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical), if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Note that if you have a testing accommodation all accommodated testing will be proctored by SSD in Lavery Hall Suite 310.

Additional Academic Resources: If you think you need additional help in this course you may always contact me and schedule a one-on-one meeting during office hours or another agreed upon time. There are also services on campus that can assist you with tutoring. One service is the Student Success Center. This center provides assistance with study skills and tutoring. Their website is <https://www.studentsuccess.vt.edu/> and are located at 110 Femoyer Hall. Virginia Tech's Writing Center also provides students assistance with writing and editing. Their website is <http://www.composition.english.vt.edu/writing-center/> and their offices are located on the second floor of the Newman Library.

Note: if you fall severely behind in this course you will receive notification through the Virginia Tech Academic Intervention program. This program is designed to assist students who fall behind in their coursework during the semester. They work with students to develop a strategy to successfully complete the course.

Student Support Services: Virginia Tech provides counseling services for students. These services are provided by Cook Counseling Center located at McComas Hall Room 240. Students are able to schedule appointments either online at <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/index.html> or by phone at 540-231-6557.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES: Mobile technologies, such as cell phones, handheld computers, PDAs, and laptop computers may only be used in class for class related purposes. Please respect your fellow students and the professor by turning off cell phones before entering class and refraining from using computers and PDAs during class to check email or instant message friends. I reserve the right to ban laptops and other mobile technologies from class if necessary.

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Cell Phones: Cell phones should be turned off during all classes. It is understood that there may be occasions when you will need to leave your cell phone on to receive a phone of extreme importance (e.g., hospital related, baby sitter related). In these extreme cases please have your cell phone set to vibrate, not ring, and sit in a location in class that allows you to easily exit class before answering the call.

Handhelds, Tablets, and Laptop Computers: Handhelds, Tablets, and laptop computers should only be used for legitimate class related purposes (e.g., taking notes). Please refrain from using these technologies for entertainment purposes during class (e.g., email, movies, music).

Canvas: Because this is a flipped course I recognize that technology issues may arise during the semester. If your computer has a problem and you are unable to complete an assignment you need to notify me immediately at (706) 338-0568 or at mcmymers@vt.edu. Do not contact me after the assignment is due to notify me of a technology problem. You should know I have no control over Canvas and its programming. If you have a Canvas issue you should contact 4Help <https://vt4help.service-now.com/ess/>. Canvas' accessibility statements can be found here <http://www.canvaslms.com/accessibility>. Assignments and quizzes are located on the Canvas site and will be turned in via this website unless otherwise stated. The Canvas site contains all relevant information about course assignments particularly the final group project. You need to look at your group under the Canvas site's people tab and look at your group assignments under the collaborations tab on the Canvas site.

INCLEMENT WEATHER: In the presence of inclement weather, there are three guidelines related to class cancellation:

1. *University Cancels Class:* VT campus closings due to inclement weather may be obtained by calling the Weather Hotline, (540) 231-6668, tuning to WVTF-FM 89.1 or 91.9, or viewing the VT home page <http://www.vt.edu>. If the university is closed, then we do not have class and I will send the class and email to that effect.
 2. *Instructor Cancels Class:* If the weather is potentially hazardous, and the university is not closed, then I may cancel class myself. If I cancel class then I will send an email to the class indicating the cancellation. During a period of inclement weather, please check your email one hour before the start of class to make sure that class will be held.
 3. *Student Misses Class:* If you determine that traveling to campus during inclement weather might be hazardous, then please send me an email indicating that you will not be attending class. Please use your best judgment in making this type of decision. If you decide not to come to class, based on inclement weather, you are still responsible for any work missed.
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HONOR CODE: The Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course. All assignments submitted shall be considered graded work, unless otherwise noted. All aspects of your coursework are covered by the Honor System. Any suspected violations of the Honor Code will be promptly reported to the Honor System. According to the Constitution of the Virginia Tech Honor System, "The fundamental beliefs underlying and reflected in the Graduate Honor Code are that (1) to trust in a person is a positive force in making a person worthy of trust, (2) to study, perform research, and teach in an environment that is free from the inconveniences and injustices caused by any form of intellectual dishonesty is a right of every graduate student, and (3) to live by an Honor

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System, which places a positive emphasis on honesty as a means of protecting this right, is consistent with, and a contribution to, the University's quest for truth." (see <http://www.cs.vt.edu/gpc/gradhc.html>)

The Honor Code, verbatim, from the VT Honor System Constitution (see <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/?q=node/5>):

The Honor Code is the University policy that expressly forbids the following academic violations:

- 1. *Cheating* -- Cheating includes the actual giving or receiving of any unauthorized aid or assistance or the actual giving or receiving of any unfair advantage on any form of academic work, or attempts thereof.**
- 2. *Plagiarism* -- Plagiarism includes the copying of the language, structure, ideas and/or thoughts of another and passing off same as one's own, original work, or attempts thereof.**
- 3. *Falsification* -- Falsification includes the statement of any untruth, either verbally or in writing, with respect to any circumstances relevant to one's academic work, or attempts thereof. Such acts include, but are not limited to, the forgery of official signatures, tampering with official records, fraudulently adding or deleting information on academic documents such as add/drop requests, or fraudulently changing an examination or other academic work after the testing period or due date of the assignment.**

You should note that I report all instances of academic dishonesty without exception. Common issues in academic dishonesty in this course involve plagiarism of short answers or final papers. You should note that copying and pasting any content from the Internet or copying outside sources verbatim without proper citation is an academic honesty violation in this course. If you have a question regarding whether something is an academic honesty violation you need to contact me before you turn an assignment in.

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COURSE SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE):

Date	Class Objectives	Reading Homework	Assignments Due Before Next Class
8/25	First Day Introduction; Underling course expectations and schedule	Swann pp. 1-15	Take Online Reading Quiz
8/27	Analyzing the meaning of public relations and appraising the efficacy of good PR.	Swann pp. 15-38	Take Online Reading Quiz
9/1	Appraising the ethics in PR practice.	Gower pp. 1-23	Take Online Reading Quiz
9/3	Debating the efficacy of PR ethics in PR practice.	Gower pp. 25-42	No Reading Quiz; 50 Word Response Due by 9/7 at 11:59 p.m.
9/8	Recognizing the legal limitations of PR practice.	Gower pp. 43-62	Take Online Reading Quiz
9/10	Explaining the speech laws affecting PR practice	Gower pp. 63-94;	Take Online Reading Quiz
9/15	Identifying privacy laws that influence PR practice	Gower pp. 95-107	Take Online Reading Quiz; 50 Word Response Due by 9/16 at 11:59 p.m.
9/17	Explaining the relationship between privacy laws and PR practice.	Review for Test 1	Study for Test 1
9/22	Test Over Public Relations Ethics and Law	Read Swann pp. 155-182	Take Online Reading Quiz.

Date	Class Objectives	Reading and Homework	Assignments Due Before Next Class
9/24	Contrasting PR management with PR practice	Read Swann pp. 226-247	Take Online Reading Quiz; I will divide you into groups for your final project and assign your topic.
9/29	Explaining Activism within PR Practice	Read Swann pp. 248-276	Take Online Reading Quiz
10/1	Employing Consumer Relations in PR practice	Read Swann pp. 277-312	Take Online Reading Quiz.
10/6	No Class but Meet in Groups to Decide How to Approach Final Project	Read Swann pp. 528-551; Read Finance for Manager pp. 1-37.	Take Online Reading Quiz; 50 Word Response Due 10/7 by 11:59 p.m.
10/8	No Class but Meet in Groups to Decide How to Approach Final Project	Read Finance for Managers pp. 38-75 & pp. 111-147	Take Online Reading Quiz
10/13	Employing budgeting within PR practice.	Read Swann pp. 422-462; Read Finance for Managers pp. 150-184.	Take Online Reading Quiz
10/15	Debating the role of community relations within PR practice	Study for Test 2	Study For Test 2
10/20	Test 2	Read Swann pp. 360-389	Take Online Reading Quiz; 50 Word Response Due by 10/21 by 11:59 p.m.
10/22	Discussing entertainment PR.	Read Swann pp. 390-421	Take Online Reading Quiz

Date	Class Objectives	Reading Homework	Assignments Due Before Next Class
10/27	Debating the efficacy of PR tactics within entertainment PR.	Read Swann pp. 462-488	Take Online Reading Quiz; 50 Word Response Due 10/28
10/29	Describing cultural influences on PR practice.	Read International PR Handout	Take Online Reading Quiz
11/3	Underlining the differences between international PR and domestic PR.	Read Swann pp. 39-54	Take Online Reading Quiz
11/5	Testing the application and usefulness of Corporate Social Responsibility	Read Handout on Crisis Communication	Take Online Quiz; 50 Word Response Due by 11/9 by 11:59 p.m.
11/10	Analyzing crisis communication strategies in PR practice.	Read Article on Crisis Communication	Take Online Reading Quiz
11/12	Appraising contingency theory within crisis communication.	Read Article on Excellence in Public Relations	No Quiz; Work on Final Project
11/17	Distinguishing excellence theory from advocacy in PR practice.	Read Swann pp. 94-122	50 Word Response Due 11/18 by 11:59 p.m.
11/19	Appraising media relations and how it affects PR practice.	Study for Test 3	Study for Test 3
11/24-11/26	Thanksgiving Break	Work on Final Project	Work on Final Project
12/2	Test 3	Test 3	Test 3
12/3	Appraise the efficacy of specific PR Cases	Presentations	Presentations
12/8	Appraise the efficacy of specific PR Cases	Presentations	Presentations

EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Quiz



Purpose: The purpose of the reading quizzes are to ensure that you read for each upcoming class so you can engage in discussion. In each class we will discuss the cases presented in the textbook in an interactive way. Because this class uses active learning as a method to process information you need to be able to come to class prepared. These in class assignments will frequently be group work. Because of this knowing the material is essential for you to contribute.



Format: The reading quizzes will be 5 questions worth 3 points each. The questions will be easy to answer if you have done the readings. Questions are taken directly from the assigned reading that day. The quizzes may be taken with the book and do not have a timed component. However, reading quizzes must be finished prior to our class meeting time by 1:59 p.m. The quiz will be given on Canvas. Below is an example question:

According to Swann which of the following is a contribution of public relations?:

- a) awareness and information
- b) organizational motivation
- c) issue anticipation
- d) all of the above

The answer is D (all of the above). The answer to this question can be found on page 3 of Swann's book. The question is derived directly from the reading. These reading quizzes are worth an aggregate of 300 points (equivalent of 15 percent of your final grade). Because of this it is important to do well on these quizzes and to read the material according to the timetable provided in the syllabus.

50 Word Responses



Purpose: The purpose of these 50 word responses is to make sure you understand the major points of each component of this course. The responses serve as a tool to synthesize the material in this course so you can use this knowledge in your final project and tests. These responses also allow me to see if you have processed and understood the major components of this course.



Format: The 50 word responses will be due the day before the class meeting on Canvas. Your writing will be in response to a question I give during the previous class. Fifty is the maximum words allowed. Each response is worth 50 points, so it is important to choose your words carefully. In these responses be sure to address the question directly. These assignments are worth an aggregate of 400 points (20 percent of your grade). Because of this it is important to take these assignments seriously and do your best.

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Three Tests



Purpose: The purpose of these tests is to ensure your knowledge of the readings and class discussions. These tests ensure that you have processed and understood core knowledge learned in the readings and class discussions. The tests also allows me to assess how much you know about public relations and if you are able to apply the theories/knowledge learned in this class to PR campaigns.



Format: The tests are worth 200 points each. It is important to maximize points on all of the tests. Each test will consist of multiple-choice questions and a series of short paragraph answers. These tests are worth an aggregate of 600 points (equivalent of 30 percent of your final grade). Because of this it is important to keep up with the readings, study, and take the tests seriously. Each test will cover the material that was read and lectured upon from test to test. For example, Test 2 will cover all of the material read after Test 1. Therefore material from Test 1 will not be repeated on Test 2. All of the tests are given in class and will take approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. All of the tests are closed book, note, and Internet.

Group Case Study



Purpose: The purpose of the group case is for you to apply what you have learned in this class to understand an organization. By applying these tools you will better understand how public relations theories, law and economics, and research informs public relations strategies.



Format: You will also be divided into groups and assigned a particular organization to examine. Your final product will use the theories, research methods, and general knowledge taught in this class. Each project will consist of a final 15-20 page paper written by the group and a final presentation. I will give you a rubric for the final project later in the semester. Each project will be presented during our final exam period at the end of the semester. Each group member will also provide a peer assessment of his or her other group members. This assessment will count toward each group member's individual grade. All of the components (final paper/presentation/peer evaluation) of the group case study are worth 700 points (approximately 35 percent of your final grade). It is important for you to work well with your group members and make a significant contribution to the project (both paper and presentation). Each group has already been created and assigned a topic. You need to look at your group under the Canvas site's people tab and look at your group assignments under the collaborations tab on the Canvas site.