

2013

MSVU Department of
Communication Studies

Prof. Patricia Parsons

GPRL 6106: PUBLIC RELATIONS ETHICS & LAW

Summer Session I, 2013 via distance

GPRL 6106: “Public Relations Ethics & Law”

Course Outline

Summer Session 1, 2013 (distance version)

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Course Overview

Proponents of public relations have argued that practitioners can serve the public interest in a democratic society by assisting in the articulation of a variety of points of view. In practice, however, public relations activities often disrupt or are perceived to disrupt communication by serving special interests at the expense of the common good.

The overall purpose of the MSVU graduate program in public relations is to transform the industry and the academic discipline by developing leaders in practice and scholarship. Practitioners and scholars in this discipline can only fulfill this ambitious goal if they have a sound understanding of the relationship between their discipline and the societal requirement for organizations of all stripes to fulfill their obligations to society. This concept of social responsibility incorporates both an ethical and a legal framework for understanding what public relations does, how it accomplishes its goals and why it is a necessary part of modern society.

Thus, the overall goals of this graduate course are as follows:

- **Knowledge:** To provide an opportunity for students to develop a knowledge base in both the theoretical and practical aspects of ethics in practice and the legal and regulatory environment within which public communication industries function.
- **Attitude:** To develop within the students the sensibilities that are necessary conditions for grasping the ethical dimensions of processes and outcomes both within the professional practice of public relations and social life in general.
- **Behavior:** To provide the students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge of ethics and the law in support of developing those qualities necessary for ethical leadership in both public relations contexts and society as a whole.

Prerequisites

The prerequisite for PBRL 6106 is admission into the graduate program in public relations/communication at MSVU or permission of the instructor.

Course Objectives

By the end of PBRL 6106, you should be able to:

1. Identify and discuss ethical theories and principles that govern the evolution of ethical thought in western society.
2. Describe the current ethical values, ideals, beliefs and behaviors within public communication industries.
3. Identify the principles upon which the ethical practice of public relations is based.
4. Apply ethical theories to the analysis of actual public relations activities.

5. Examine the current legal and regulatory environment within which public communication activities operate.
6. Discuss specific areas of Canadian law that have an impact on public relations practice.
7. Differentiate between those public relations activities that are constrained by law and those activities that are (or ought to be) constrained by considerations of ethics. .
8. Discuss how considerations of both ethical and legal parameters must be integral parts of the strategic planning process

Course Structure

This is normally a 12-week course divided into four (4) online workshops each of three weeks duration. Naturally, during summer school, the timeline is compressed. We will follow the usual progression, but please note that you will not, in fact, have a full week for each of analysis, synthesis and application.

Analysis	<p>Analysis: the process of studying the material and separating it into its constituent elements thereby facilitating an understanding of its essential features.</p> <p>You will contribute a <i>reflective</i> summary to the Workshop forum.</p>
Synthesis	<p>Synthesis: the process of taking the elements of the analysis and recombining them in an effort to understand how they might be realigned and how one might examine the elements in a new light.</p> <p>To synthesize newly learned content from each of the first two (2) workshops, you are challenged to integrate assigned reading as well as additional readings of your choice to support the completion of a brief research paper. <i>These two brief papers will provide the foundation for your final research paper that you will work on through workshops 3 and 4 so be sure to select your initial theory carefully – you will be spending a lot of time with it during this course!</i></p>
Application	<p>Application: the process of putting synthesized material to use thereby rendering more esoteric content relevant in practice.</p> <p>During Workshops 1 & 2, you will participate in an online exercise: our ethics wiki.¹</p>

¹ A wiki is "...a collaborative website whose content can be edited by anyone who has access to it." www.dictionary.com (further information about this collaborative assignment is found later in this document).

Summary of the Online Workshops & Deadlines

	Content Focus	Analysis	Synthesis	Application
Workshop #1 April 29-May 12	Foundations of Ethical Thought	Reading assignment and summary forum post DUE DATE: May 8	Brief research paper DUE DATE: May 12	Original contribution to our ethics wiki. DUE DATE: May 10
Workshop #2 May 13-26	Theoretical Constructs of Ethics in Public Communication	Reading assignment and summary forum post DUE DATE: May 22	Brief research paper DUE DATE: May 26	Wiki edit. DUE DATE: May 24
Workshop #3 May 27-June 9	Issues in Practitioner Ethics: Technical & Managerial	Reading assignment and summary forum post DUE DATE: June 5	Begin work on in-Depth research paper	None
Workshop #4 June 10-21	Issues in Law Affecting Public Communication	Reading assignment and summary forum post DUE DATE: June 19	Work on in-depth research paper continued DUE DATE: June 20	None

Intellectual Property Protection Statement

The lectures and materials provided to students in this course are the property of the professor or MSVU unless otherwise acknowledged. Class slides, podcasts, videos and any other materials provided may not be used for anything other than study purposes and may not be reproduced in any manner without permission. Materials may be downloaded from the class site and single copies made for personal academic use.

Course Reading

This course requires you to complete extensive reading almost entirely from the scholarly literature related to ethics and ethical issues in the field of public communication in general and public relations in particular. The readings for legal issues are less scholarly.

The course textbook will be the following:

Waluchow, W. (2003). *The dimensions of ethics: An introduction to ethical theory*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

This text must be read in its entirety during Workshop 1.

All other workshop readings are journal articles available in the MSVU library database or on WWW sites. Details are provided in each individual workshop.

Assignments

Analysis: You will analyse the readings in a reflective summary of the workshop's assigned readings, and post this reflection on the Workshop forum for discussion.

This summary will comprise a 250-400 word analytical reflection due to be posted to the forum on the due date by midnight (Atlantic Time).

Your forum participation consisting of both four posts and your responses (engagement in online discussion) are worth a total of 15% of your final grade.

Synthesis: During workshops 1 & 2, this takes the form of a brief research paper of between 900-1100 words (not including references; if the paper is longer than the assigned work count, I will not read beyond the assigned count). Specific instructions about the topic areas from which to choose and the treatment expected are provided in a separate document on the Moodle site. Papers are to be uploaded to the appropriate assignment centre (these are clearly identified within the individual workshops on the Moodle site) by 11:55 (Atlantic Time) pm on the deadline indicated. The assignment centers will not accept late papers.

Each of these papers is worth 15% of your final grade for a total of 30%.

The synthesis assignment for Workshop 3-4 is a more in-depth research paper (2300-2600 words) that is due at the end of the course. It is worth 35% of your final grade.

Further instructions for all three of these papers are posted on the Moodle site.

Application: To demonstrate your understanding of the content, you will apply your knowledge in each content area to the development of an online wiki on the topic of public relations ethics. ***Each student is required to submit one article for workshop 1 and a substantive edit of a current entry for workshop 2.***

- Select a topic that you'd like to write about (one that has not been covered to date) and ***confer with your peers about your topic on the wiki forum for the workshop to avoid duplication***. If more than one student selects the same topic, you are required to negotiate to avoid duplication – this is a peer issue, not a professor one. Remember that the wiki is open to the public for reference. Details on wikis and the specifics of the assignment can be found in the ***Wiki Primer*** document.
- Submissions should be 500-700 words and this is not an academic treatise: remember that practitioners, undergrad and graduate students are your primary audience and that ***source citation and linkages are mandatory***, but academic style citation is not necessary. Use footnotes and in-text links. You can also include pictures that are properly cited. These make for more readable wikis.
- In addition to posting the material on the wiki, your submission must also be uploaded as a Word or RTF document to the Wiki assignment center for that workshop for private feedback from the professor. These are due at 11:55 pm (Atlantic Time) on the due date. The submission centers will not accept late submissions. ***Make sure that your last name is the first word of the file name.***
- The workshop 2 wiki edit is to be created by copying and pasting the current entry into a Word document and editing it with “track changes” on for private feedback. The actual edit on the wiki will be in final form.
- The original wiki entry and the wiki edit are each worth 10% for a total of 20% of your final grade.

Summary of Marking Scheme Summary

Forum participation (individual posts and discussion engagement)	15%
Brief research paper #1	15%
Brief research paper #2	15%
Final research paper	35%
Wiki participation: original post	10%
Wiki participation: edit	10%

Participation

Your participation in the Forum discussions is an important part of your learning. As you can see from the marking scheme, you are being marked on it; however, it is in your best interests to become engaged with the material, your peers and your prof. You will learn a lot more that way.

Workload and Deadlines

This is an intensive, work-laden graduate course. It requires a considerable time commitment, similar to an on-campus course with the addition of the requirement for self-discipline, and in the case of summer school, doubled up for the period of the course.

Student Responsibilities

- It is your responsibility to **check the site at least every two days**. New materials and updates are posted as we move along, and it is up to you to ensure that you do not miss anything. Check the forums and all updates. You are subscribed to all forums; this means that ***you will receive an email every time a post is made by me or one of your classmates***. It is your responsibility to ensure that the email on your Moodle profile is the one that will actually reach you. Please note that the DLCE department is insisting on MSVU emails.
- All assignments have strict **deadlines** to which we will adhere strictly. Email submissions or submissions directed to an assignment centre on the web site are due at 11:55 pm Atlantic Time on the assigned day unless otherwise noted. ***It is your responsibility to ensure that***

you know what time zone you are in and what time it is in the Atlantic zone. I will not mark late assignments; however, to pass the course you are required to submit every assignment even if it is worth zero (0). Failure to complete even one of the assignments will result in an F.

- This is grad school: you are expected to demonstrate a highly developed ability to work independently and be self-motivated. This is especially important in a distance course; failure to meet reading or work deadlines will seriously compromise your ability to achieve a reasonable grade.
- “University regulations on Plagiarism and Cheating will be strictly enforced. These regulations are posted on boards and are found in the university calendar.” I am well aware of the Web paper mills and I will seek out the source of any paper that looks fishy to me. “Correct use of language is one of the criteria included in the evaluation of written assignments.” MSVU Calendar
- "Students who have a disability and who require academic accommodations must register with Disability Services as early as possible in order to receive accommodations."
(<http://www.msvu.ca/disabilityservices>)
- Adhere to the guidelines of *the American Psychological Association* for preparation of academic papers. The complete APA guide is always on reserve in the library or you can refer to the précis on the course web site. In addition, there are lots of other web sites that provide excellent explanations of the details of APA style. The bottom line is, however, that as a graduate student you should own a copy of it and treat it like your bible.

Research

Students who conduct research involving human participants must have their research reviewed in accordance with the *MSVU Policies and Procedures for Ethics Review of Research* before starting the research. Check with your course professor or Chair of the Department about proper procedure.

Resources

- **MSVU Grad Studies Calendar** <http://www.msvu.ca/calendar/graduate.asp>
- **MSVU Library** <http://www.msvu.ca/library/>
- **MSVU Writing Resource Centre**
http://www.msvu.ca/student_affairs/WRC/index.asp
- **Distance Learning and Continuing Education**
<http://www.msvu.ca/Distance/index.asp>
- **MSVU Student Affairs** http://www.msvu.ca/student_affairs/index.asp

Distance Learning Student guide

http://www.msvu.ca/distance/DLCE_Student_Guides/DLCE_Student_Guide.pdf