
Public Relations: Social & Organizational Context

GPRL 6010

Course Outline

September-December, 2008

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Office Hours:	Tuesday Noon – 1 pm Wednesday afternoon by appointment
Class Hours:	Tuesday, 9:05 – 11:45 am
Web Site:	MSVU Moodle live site

Course Overview

Public Relations 6010 is a graduate-level course that provides you with a foundational understanding of the concept of public relations as a function and a practice. We do this through an examination of the historical development of the industry and the profession placing it within its historical and social contexts. We examine various models of practice, the so-called "Public Relations Process," and the nature of public opinion and its relationship to public relations.

Course Philosophy

The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn.

GLORIA STEINEM

Pre-Requisite

Permission of the department.

Course Objectives

On successful completion of GPRL 6010, you will be able to:

- 1) Discuss the historical development of public relations as a professional practice and as a discipline of study.
- 2) Demonstrate understanding of the models of public relations practice.
- 3) Differentiate between technical and managerial practices within the field.
- 4) Demonstrate an understanding of the public relations process.
- 5) Discuss the relationships between the modern function of public relations and other organizational activities.
- 6) Discuss the major ethical and social issues surrounding the practice of public relations.

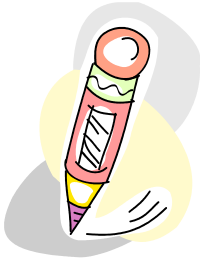
- 7) Analyze the industry's practices and the public relations practices of specific organizations.
- 8) Discuss public relations' role as organizational advocate.

Student Responsibilities

Each individual student is responsible for the following:

- Attending all classes; reading all assigned materials; completing all assignments. It is especially crucial that you attend all seminar presentations by your classmates. If you miss one you are subject to losing marks.
- All assignments have strict **deadlines** to which we will adhere unless you are in a coma. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class on the scheduled date. Late assignments will lose 20% per day starting on the day that they are late. For example, a paper passed in at 5 pm on a day when it is due at 1 pm will lose 20% that day. If it is passed in the next day, it loses another 20% and so on. If you are going to have difficulty meeting a deadline, discuss it with me **in advance** and it may be possible for us to make other fair arrangements if I am convinced of the validity and seriousness of your problem.
- All assignments must be **laser printed** and look professional.
- This is grad school: you are expected to demonstrate a highly developed ability to work independently.
- "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
- 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.
- Please! During class, no caps with peaks and no gum chewing! I will afford you the same courtesy. And please be on time. Latecomers disrupt discussion.

Department of Public Relations Writing Competence Requirement



BASIC WRITING COMPETENCE IS A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR PASSING THIS COURSE

Because writing is an important part of our field's professional practice, the Department of Public Relations cannot allow its students to graduate or intern if they do not have the ability to write correct English. Consequently, writing competence is a requirement in all department courses, and it must be demonstrated in all classes. This means that students who fail more than one assignment in this course due to a lack of writing competence will not pass, regardless the accumulation of points they achieve through team work, class participation, and the like.

The department plays a significant role in developing student writing; however, it does not offer instruction in basic writing skills because these skills are beneath the academic level at which PR courses occur. The faculty presumes that every student's general education included twelve years of writing-skills training, and therefore expects an English language competence in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and semantics. The responsibility to achieve that minimal standard lies with the student.

The professor will not suspend this requirement by virtue of a student's willingness to obtain remedial writing instruction. The public relations profession is writing intensive, and employers expect PR students to excel as writers, in comparison with the general public. Consequently the department requires the actual existence of writing skills, rather than the hope or the promise of these skills, as a condition for advancing students.

Reading Assignment



Is there any point in a professor calling his or her reading assignment "required"? Either students will complete the reading necessary to learn as much as possible and complete in a meaningful way the assignments or they won't, and the outcomes will reflect this choice. Indeed, if you are planning to pass this course, you will complete the assigned reading and you might consider completing some on the next list of enrichment reading.

If you need to have someone tell you what is "required," then consider the following two books:

Coombs, T. & Holladay, S. (2007). *It's not just PR: Public relations in society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Mickey, T. (2003). *Deconstructing public relations: Public relations criticism*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates.

Course Prerequisite

Permission of the department.

Class Web Site



The companion web site for this course is located on the MSVU Moodle Live server. As a registered member of GPRL 6010 you have access to it. If you are not familiar with using a companion web site for a university course, now is the time to get comfortable. You should check this site at least once a week. Uses:

- I will use it to share online resources with you as the course progresses. This includes class slide presentations.
- I will use it to message you in the event of class cancellations etc. or to post news of interest to all. You can also post news.
- We can use it to discuss issues that arise in class.
- There is a specific forum on the site to which you will upload your research papers for peer review. The reviews will subsequently be posted on the site for the benefit of all of us.
- All written assignments will be submitted by uploading to the site.

Marking Scheme

Assignment	Value	Date Due
Research Paper <i>Proposal</i> <i>Peer Review</i>	35%	October 29 <i>September 24</i> <i>November 5</i>
Seminar Presentation	30%	November 19 & 26 In class
Final Exam (take home)	35%	December 9

Assignment Details



Research Paper & Peer Review

The purposes of this assignment which is worth 35% of your grade for GPRL 6010 are as follows:

- 1) To provide you with an opportunity to explore the scholarly literature in the field of public relations;
- 2) To evaluate your ability to analyze and synthesize academic research materials;
- 3) To evaluate your skill in preparing academic argument and writing in a scholarly style;
- 4) To provide you with an opportunity both to be a peer reviewer and to be peer reviewed.

The Components

You will select from among the following questions and prepare a proposal for how you intend to pursue your hypothesis:

- **To what extent is public relations a necessary function of 21st century society?**
- **What is the most important professional/ethical issue facing public relations today?**
- **Is public relations better conceptualized as a social science or as an art?**
- **How will the so-called Web 2.0 paradigm affect the future of public relations?**
- **How important is it for public relations to be defined as a “profession” in modern society?**

The paper will be a scholarly examination of your proposed hypothesis (which will be your answer to the question). It will be 2500-3000 words and the word count will be indicated on the cover page. It will be based on a thorough examination of the relevant literature and will indicate your ability to analyze materials and synthesize them into new and interesting ways of viewing a topic.

It will further indicate your ability to write a high-quality academic paper using correct grammar, punctuation, syntax etc and following precisely the style guidelines of the American Psychological Association for citing sources. You will consult a wide variety of scholarly sources and will use at least 15 of them as support for your thesis. Non-academic sources (e.g. industry literature) may also be consulted in addition to these scholarly ones. Be wary of using WWW sources unless you have verified their credibility. **No blog or Wikipedia references whatsoever.**

The Grading

The grade will be broken down as follows: Of the 35%, I will provide 25%. The remaining 10% will be divided between your peer review results and your reviews of others. If you fail to review even one of your colleagues' papers, you will automatically lose 5%.

You will submit a proposal indicating your thesis statement, some of the resources you will use and the organization of your argument. This proposal is required before you can submit a paper but will not count toward your mark. It is due to be submitted to me through our course site as a .doc or .rtf file attachment by 11:55 pm **September 24, 2008**.

The complete paper is due to be submitted to me through the course site and posted on the "Research Paper Peer Review Forum" on **October 29, 2008** by 11:55 pm Atlantic Time.

Please note that the course site will not accept late assignments. If your assignment is going to be late, you'll have to get in touch with me directly.

The peer reviews will take the form of an online posting of a brief review of the paper in the forum where the papers are posted. Reviews must be posted within one week of the submission date. (**November 5, 2008** 11:55 pm Atlantic Time).



Seminar Presentation

Leading seminars and making presentations are important parts of both being a graduate student and a public relations practitioner, researcher or teacher. This assignment is worth 30% of your grade. Of this, 10% will be based on **peer evaluation** in class. Anyone who fails to evaluate even one of their classmates' presentations will automatically lose 5% from his or her own grade.

The purposes of this assignment are as follows:

- 1) To provide you with an opportunity to hone your skills in preparing and delivering high-quality academic presentations.

- 2) To introduce you the concept of case-studies for analysis of public relations processes and practices.

Definition of a Case Study

Paul R. Lawrence, defines the case study as follows:

A good case is the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor. A good case keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations. It is the anchor on academic flights of speculation. It is the record of complex situations that must be literally pulled apart and put together again before the situations can be understood. It is the target for the expression of attitudes or ways of thinking brought into the classroom.¹

Case Study Topics

The cases upon which you will build your study are delineated in your course textbook *Deconstructing Public Relations* (Mickey). You will select and sign up for one of the following:

- Alcohol as medicine
- Representation of women
- Selling the internet
- Garden according to Martha Stewart
- A community relations campaign
- The language of mental illness
- The ideology of an AIDS prevention campaign
- The Monet exhibit
- Olympic gold

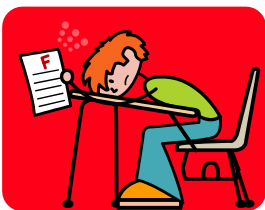
¹ Paul R Lawrence, 'The Preparation of Case Material,' in Kenneth R Andrews, ed., *The Case Method of Teaching Human Relations and Administration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 215.

Presentation Requirements

- 1) Presentation of the ***Situation***: A description of as much information about the organization as you can find, not limited to what the author has presented in the chapter. Includes a contextual discussion of the industry in which this organization operates. Consider PR issues such as the organization's publics and challenges/opportunities within its environment.
- 2) Articulate identification of the ***problem or opportunity*** that this particular technique capitalizes on.
- 3) Presentation of in-depth information about the public relations strategy utilized and the tactics employed to ***implement*** that strategy.
- 4) A discussion of how the strategy was evaluated and how it could have been evaluated.
- 5) A discussion of how this case applies in the Canadian, Atlantic Canadian and local contexts.
- 6) Articulate a list of *lessons learned* – in other words, what are the elements of this case that have taught you something about public relations?
- 7) Identify the one most important lesson and provide your rationale for it.
- 8) Be sure to provide appropriate and complete documentation and write it well using a formal business style.

The amount of time that you will have to present will be provided as soon as we have an actual head count for class registration firmed up during the second week of classes.

Final Examination



The purpose of a written examination is to provide you with the opportunity to demonstrate a strong grasp of the material covered through the entire semester. You are expected to be familiar with the literature and to be able to present your arguments in answer to the questions in a cogent, creative and well-documented way.

Any of the material we have covered in class including any and all seminar presentations or research papers by your classmates is likely to be included in the exam in some way.

Following the regulations set out by the university registrar, each student will submit to a ***take-home examination*** that will be distributed to each student in person at the end of the final class. It is due to be submitted online at the course site one week later.

Instructions for submission:

- Read all questions carefully and answer them fully.
- Supporting material must be referenced accurately and completely.
- Copyedit the final submission carefully.
- Ensure that the pages are numbered and there is a header that includes your name and email address.
- Use a cover page that contains the following information: your name and student number, course name and number, the date, your email address and telephone number.
- Save it in a Word document or RTF file and upload it to the assignment repository labelled "Final Examination" on the course web site.
- The settings have been set to disallow any late submissions. Submitting a final exam late is equivalent to not showing up for an in-person exam. If you are wise, you will submit it at least 12 hours before the deadline.

Your paper will not be returned to you as per the university regulations concerning final exams. If you wish to review your paper, please make an appointment after January 3, 2009 and I'd be happy to review it with you.

Due Date: December 9, 2008 11:55 pm Atlantic Time.



Tentative Class Schedule

Date	Class Content	Reading
September 9	Introduction to the course Graduate Study in Public Relations	
September 16	Social Context: Defining PR for the 21 st Century (Does society need PR?)	Coombs & Holladay, introduction & chapter 1
September 23	Social Context: The History of a Tarnished Reputation (Where did PR come from and what does this history have to do with the present and the future?)	Coombs & Holladay, chapter 3
September 30	Social Context: Ethics and Professionalism (Is PR ethical?)	Coombs & Holladay, chapter 2
October 7	Social Context: The Public Relations Practitioner (Who are these people, where do they practice, what do they do and why do they do it?)	Begin reading all case studies in Mickey (chapters 3-11)
October 14	Social Context: Public Opinion and its Connection to PR (What kind of power relationship is there between public opinion and the public relations industry?)	Coombs & Holladay, chapter 4
October 21 & 28	Organizational Context: PR as a Strategic Management Function (Where does PR 'fit' within organizations? What is real? What is ideal?)	
October 29	Organizational Context: Organizations & their Publics: PR's <i>Raison d'etre</i> (How do organizations determine priority publics?)	Review chapter 3
November 4 & 18	Bringing it all together: Overview of the Theoretical Bases of Public Relations (What justification does PR have for how it does, when it does it and to whom?)	
November 25	Student seminar presentations	Mickey, chapters 3-11
December 2	Student seminar presentations	Mickey, chapters 3-11

The Daily Questions



Each day at the beginning of class we'll take a poll. Based on your readings and your thoughts following the previous class, grad students (who are particularly thoughtful and inquisitive) usually have questions. We'll poll you on the questions have arisen in your minds.

We'll either discuss them as a group before beginning the day's scheduled topic, or we'll weave them into the class as it progresses each day. All students are expected to participate by both raising questions and discussing their answers.



Reading for Enrichment

Books

- Cohen, Randy. (2002). *The good, the bad and the difference: How to tell right from wrong in everyday situations*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Cutlip, S., Center, A. & Broom, G. (2005). *Effective public relations*. 9th ed. Prentice Hall. (or a newer edition)
- Frankfurt, Harry. (2005). *On bullshit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mitchell, L. (1996). *The ultimate grad school survival guide*. Peterson's Education Center.
- Nelson, Joyce. (1989). *The Sultans of sleaze: Public relations and the media*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press.
- O'Hara, Kieron. (2004). *Trust: From Socrates to spin*. Cambridge (UK): Icon Books Ltd.
- Parsons, Patricia J. (2008). *Ethics in public relations: A guide to best practice*. 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.
- Peters, R. (1007). *Getting what you came for: The smart student's guide to earning an MA or PhD*. 2nd ed. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Periodicals

- Bruning, S. D., & Ledingham, J. A. (1999). Relationships between organizations and publics: Development of a multi-dimensional organization-public relationship scale. *Public Relations Review*, 25(2), 157-170.

- Creedon, P. (1989, Autumn). Public relations history misses 'her story'. *Journalism Educator*, 44(3), 26-30.
- Gower, K. (2001, Spring). Rediscovering women in public relations. *Journalism History*, 27(1), 14. R
- Grunig, L., Toth, E., & Hon, L. (2000, January). Feminist values in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(1), 49-68.
- Huang, Y. H. (2001). OPRA: A cross-cultural, multiple-item scale for measuring organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13(1), 61-90.
- Hutton, J. (1999, Summer). The definition, dimensions, and domain of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 25(2), 199.
- Johansen, P. (2001, February). Professionalisation, building respectability, and the birth of the Canadian public relations society. *Journalism Studies*, 2(1), 55-71.
- Lee, S. (2005, Summer). The emergence of global public and international public relations. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50(2), 14-16.
- L'Etang, J. (2005, November). Critical public relations: Some reflections. *Public Relations Review*, 31(4), 521-526.
- McBride, G. (1989). Ethical thought in public relations history: Seeking a relevant perspective. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 4(1), 5-20.
- Messina, A. (2007). Public relations, the public interest and persuasion: an ethical approach. *Journal of Communication Management*, 11(1), 29-52.
- Miller, K. (2000). U.S. Public relations history: Knowledge and limitations. *Communication Yearbook*, 23, 381-420.
- Sharpe, M. (2000, Fall). Developing a behavioral paradigm for the performance of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 26(3), 345.
- Spicer, C. (1993). Images of public relations in the print media. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5(1), 47-61.
- van Leuven, J., & Slater, M. (1991). How publics, public relations, and the media shape the public opinion process. *Public Relations Research Annual*, 3, 165.

Journals

It is very important that graduate students familiarize themselves with the primary scholarly sources in their discipline in the fastest time possible. This will facilitate daily reading and discovery of new knowledge.

To help you with this process, here is a list of the public relations–related journals with which you should develop more than a passing relationship. All of these are available through the MSVU electronic database.

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Public Relations Review
 Journal of Public Relations Research
 Corporate Communications: An International Journal
 Public Relations Research Annual
 Journal of Mass Media Ethics
 Journal of Communications
 Media Studies
 Journal of Business Ethics
 Public Relations Research Annual
 Critical Studies in Media Communication
 International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics
 Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media
 Mass Media
 Media, Culture & Society
 Public Opinion Quarterly
 International Journal of Public Opinion Research
 Canadian Journal of Communication
 Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies
 Communication Quarterly
 Communication Monographs
 Communication Research
 Communication Review
 Communication Theory
 Critical Studies in Media Communication

Industry Publications

The following publications are not scholarly in nature but do, however, provide industry background and are important for public relations practitioners and scholars.

Communication World
 Public Relations Tactics
 Public Relations Strategist
 Public Relations Quarterly
 Public Relations Journal (now defunct)
 Ragan's Media Relations Report
 Business Communication Quarterly