

GPRL 6202: Special Topics in Public Relations: Social Media in Public Communication

Course Outline, Spring 2009 (via distance)

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Course Overview

Although to many people in the wider public, social media's incarnations in such platforms as Youtube, Facebook, Digg, Wikipedia and the like may seem innocuous enough, there are important cultural and communication issues that are problematic while at the same time providing communicators with a significant opportunity. What is needed is a critical examination of these tools, their meanings and their impacts so that we might better understand and harness their potential.

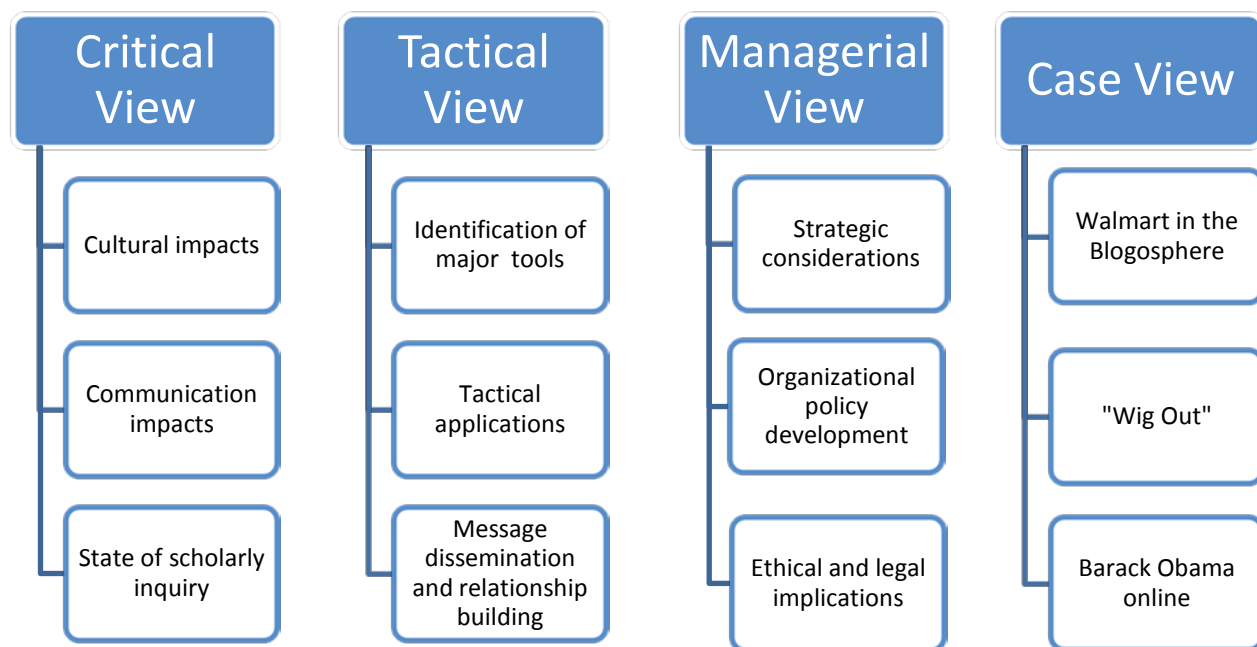
GPRL 6202 (Special topics: Social Media for Public Communication) provides graduate students with an in-depth, critical examination of social media as tools of public communication. This course addresses some of the cultural and communication impacts of social media by critical examination of the underlying theoretical, tactical and managerial perspectives. In addition, as a consequence of the rapid evolution of both the technologies and the applications, the course will allow students to understand that conclusions that they may draw today, might have different interpretations within a very short period of time.

Teaching and Learning Platform

This course is taught in its entirety via the course management platform called Moodle. Asynchronous in nature, the course allows for maximum flexibility for individual students. While adhering precisely to deadlines set, students are invited to pursue the intervening course requirements at their leisure. Familiarity with Moodle is essential to success in this course. Please note links to resource materials at the end of this outline.

Course Format

The course is divided into four “modules” each with three themes as follows:



Please see the calendar of dates and deadlines posted on the site for details about when and how each module will be covered.

Communication

All communication will be done via our virtual classroom: our Moodle site. I will also be having telephone and email office hours TBA.

Course Pre-Requisites

Admission to the MA (PR) or MPR program and successful completion of all qualifying requirements if applicable, or permission of the instructor.

Overall Goals of This Course

There are three general goals that I have in presenting this course to you.

1. To enhance your knowledge about social media tools and tactics and their cultural and communication implications.
2. To inculcate in you an attitude of critical analysis regarding the evolution of social media.
3. To assist you to further develop your skills in the application of social media to public relations problems and opportunities.

Student Learning Objectives

In addition to the overall goals that I have in presenting this material to you, the following constitute the objectives that you will work toward achieving and upon which the evaluation tools are based.

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Critically analyze the evolution of social media as both a cultural and a communication phenomenon.
2. Discuss relevant theoretical foundations for the analysis and application of social media strategies.
3. Discuss the impact social media adoption has had on professional practice models in public relations.
4. Identify areas for scholarly study to further understand the communication and cultural implications of social media.
5. Evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of a variety of social media tools in terms of potential communication and relationship outcomes.
6. Identify important strategic considerations in the development of social media policy within organizations.
7. Analyze the impact that such tools can have on the development and nurturance of long-term relationships between organizations and their important publics.
8. Discuss the ethical and legal implications of social media applications on a personal, organizational and societal level.
9. Critically examine current cases of social media strategy.

Course Reading



It will be essential for you for a passing grade to read the following textbook in its entirety. This book is a collection of essays on new media by a variety of public relations scholars. Since the study of this area is very new, the ideas and

theories put forward are open for critical analysis. I hope that you will read this book with a critical eye. And that you will begin reading it soon.

Also, please note well that this reading is the basis for Forum discussion in each module of the course.

Duhé, S. ed. (2007). *New media and public relations*. New York: Peter Lang.

Additional readings and online resources that you will need to pass the course are noted in the individual modules.

Evaluation Plan

The following assignments will constitute your evaluation for this course:

Research paper (critical approach)	35%	Due: June 7
Peer Review of Research papers	15%	Due: June 14
Participation (Class blog & forums)	25%	Due: as per end of modules for forums Blog open until June 26
Case Analysis (2-person team) includes online presentation	25%	Due: June 21

Details of Assignments

1 -Research Paper & Peer Review

The purposes of this assignment which is worth a total of **50%** (paper 35%; peer review 15%) of your final grade for GPRL 6202 are as follows:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to explore the scholarly literature in the emerging field of social media;
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

As you work through the reading and online material for Module 1, find a topic for your research paper. The following questions are offered to help you to frame a topic that connects the new social media with a theoretical approach to public relations as a practice and as an academic discipline.

- **To what extent has the advent of social media changed the public relations and corporate communications landscape?**

- **How can practitioners balance the ‘new media’ with more traditional approaches to communication and relationship building?**
- **How can communication/public relations scholars help the discipline and the practice regarding understanding social media?**

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.

You will upload your paper to both the assignment centre as well as to the peer review forum as indicated on the site. The peer review forum is where you will read and review one another's papers.

File Format

Papers should be prepared using MS Word™. Please note that I will have no problem opening .docx files (Word 2007), but not all of your classmates will have upgraded Word and might need it to be a .doc or a .rtf file. Also, if you are working on a Mac rather than a PC, you'll have to ensure that the rest of us can open the file. Post two versions: .doc and .rtf.

The files should be named as follows:

Lastname_firstname_6202_researchpaper09.doc

The Grading

The grade will be broken down as follows: I will provide your paper with a grade out of 35%. The quality and thoughtfulness of your critiques of your classmates' papers will provide the 15% peer review mark (i.e. your peer review mark is based on how well you review the other papers – not on what your classmates think of your paper).

The complete paper is due to be submitted to me through the course site **as a post** on the "Research Paper Peer Review Forum" **and** to the assignment centre (for my copy) on **June 7, 2009** by 11:55 pm Atlantic Time.

Please note that the assignment centre on 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. See policy on late assignments below.

The peer reviews will take the form of an online posting of a review of the paper in the forum where the papers are posted. Reviews must be posted within one week of the submission date. They are due **June 14, 2009** by 11:55 pm Atlantic Time).

2- Participation

Your participation in your own learning is important. Therefore the purposes of being graded for your participation are as follows:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to interact with both your professor and your classmates;
2. To provide an opportunity for further engagement in constructing your own learning;
3. To assess your ability to synthesize your understanding of these issues and your ability to articulate these in response to others.

The Components

There are two main components to your participation – which is worth **25%** of your overall grade for this special topics course.

- *The Class Blog*

We will maintain a blog throughout this course. At a minimum, I expect each student to make a blog entry and to respond to at least one other blog entry at some point during the course. The entries should be thoughtful, well-written, and topical and should consider the reader.

- *Module Forums*

Each of the four modules has its own forum for discussion. The forum topic for discussion will be posted with each module. **At a minimum** you are expected to contribute at least one entry to each forum. Your entries should be thoughtful, well-written, focused on the topic and suitable for a class discussion. The entry may be written or recorded as an audio or a video clips. The forum discussions will focus on the assigned reading as noted in each module and forum description.

Please note the deadlines for each of the module forum discussions. [1-May 10; 2-May 24; 3-June 7; 4-June 21]. The class blog will be open for contributions until 5 pm on June 26. After that I will be grading all participation.

- *The difference between your blog and your forum participation*

Pay close attention to the professor's "Introduction to the Course" video for details on the difference between a blog entry and a forum post.

3- Case Analysis

Your case analysis assignment is worth 25% of your final grade for this special topics course. Working with a partner, you will find a case where an organization has utilized a social media strategy for better or for worse. Please note that both students in the team will receive the same grade.

The purposes of this assignment are as follows:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to scan the environment to uncover cases of social media use.
2. To assess your ability to analyze the new concepts you have constructed as a result of this course.
3. To assess your ability to apply new concepts to real-life situations.

The Components

There are two components to this assignment

- *The Analysis*

Each team of two will select and analyze a case where social media tools/tactics or overall strategy have been employed by an organization/person/cause. The quality of the analysis will be evaluated.

- *The Presentation*

Each team is responsible for presenting this case to his/her classmates. This can be done in a variety of creative ways (e.g. wiki, slide presentation, podcast, video). A forum for posting links to your assignment etc. will be provided. If you need a web space to store the file(s) let me know and I'll upload them to the course site and provide you with details about linking. The presentation is due to be uploaded by **June 21, 2009** at 11:55 pm Atlantic Time.

Required Components for the Analysis

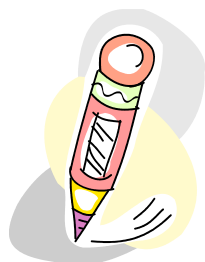
- The ***Situation***: A description of the organization and its publics, and a contextual discussion of the industry and environment in which this organization operates.
- Identification of the ***problem or opportunity*** that this particular technique capitalizes on.
- How the social media approach was ***implemented***.
- How the strategy was ***evaluated*** and how it could have been evaluated.
- A discussion of how this case applies in the Canadian, Atlantic Canadian and local contexts.
- A list of ***lessons learned***.
- Identify the one most important lesson and provide your rationale for it.
- Documentation (business style – APA not required for this one)

Course Policies & Student Responsibilities

Each individual student is responsible for the following:

- Reading carefully every piece of material on the site; reading every forum and news post, watching/ listening to posted videos and podcasts, reviewing any slide presentations, participating in the forum discussions & posting to the class blog; reading all suggested readings.
- All assignments have strict **deadlines** to which we will adhere unless you are in a coma. Late assignments will lose 20% per day starting on the day that they are late. 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.
- Research papers must be **uploaded to the course site by the deadline** after which the site will no longer accept papers. Please note that all times are Atlantic Time. With permission, late assignments may be emailed to me.
- This is grad school: you are expected to demonstrate a highly developed ability to work independently.
- You play a vital role in contributing to and maintaining the culture of academic integrity expected of everyone at MSVU. Statement on Plagiarism and Cheating: “University regulations on Plagiarism and Cheating and academic offenses will be strictly enforced. These regulations including applicable procedures and penalties are detailed in the University Calendar and are posted on Department notice boards and on the website at www.msvu.ca on the Current Student’s page under Academic Offenses.” I am well aware of the Web paper mills and I will seek out the source of any paper that looks fishy to me. If you have any questions about these expectations, please ask me about them.
- “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.
- Class Cancellation policy: <http://www.msvu.ca/distance/Cancellation%20Policy.asp>

Department of Public Relations/Communication Studies 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.

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