

Mount Saint Vincent University
Department of Public Relations

Public Relations 4017

"Public Relations Ethics"

September -December, 2004

dev'il's ad'vocate

1. a person who advocates an opposing or unpopular cause for the sake of argument or to expose it to a thorough examination.
2. Also called **promoter of the faith**. *Rom. Cath. Ch.* an official appointed to present arguments against a proposed beatification or canonization of a beatus

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 Section 2: Tuesday, 1:30-4:20 pm
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Course Overview

Public Relations 4017 is a senior-level, required course for all students registered in the Bachelor of Public Relations degree. It is designed to provide an overview of ethical theories and principles that are useful for the development of a framework for ethical decision-making in the professional practice of Public Relations. This is an opportunity for students to examine their own personal value systems and compare these with the value system inherent in the ethical practice of public relations and public communication.

The underlying ethical principles are brought into sharp focus by the application of these to actual issues that are common in the field of practice.

Students are required to demonstrate a high degree of critical analysis when examining actual cases and scenarios and in the application of their new knowledge to the solutions of ethical dilemmas in the field.

Pre-Requisite

Students are required to have completed PBRL 2014 and should be taking PBRL 3014 concurrently.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of PBRL 4017, the students will be able to:

1. Discuss the historical developments in the field of Public Relations that have led to a tarnished reputation in some segments of the practice.
2. Discuss the some of the historical theoretical bases for ethical decision-making.
3. Use theories as rationales for making defensible ethical decisions.
4. Examine their own ethical backgrounds and assess their level of ethical functioning both in their personal and professional lives.
5. Identify the basic principles upon which the ethical practice of Public Relations is based.
6. Identify and discuss important current issues resulting in ethical dilemmas in the practice of professional Public Relations.
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of codes of ethics in professional disciplines.
8. Discuss the relationship between the profession's code(s) of ethics and the ideology of professionalism.
9. Differentiate between organizational ethics programs and the ethical practice of Public Relations and discuss PR's role in the organizational program.
10. Evaluate the academic and trade literature on ethics topics related to Public Relations and public communication.
11. Demonstrate thoughtful reflection on ethics issues inherent in the everyday practice of Public Relations.
12. Demonstrate a belief in the social value of Public Relations.

Student Responsibilities

Each individual student is responsible for the following:

These are our rules of engagement: show up, pay attention, be honest, don't be attached to the outcomes and do more than the minimum.

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 5pm 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. At the very least, I expect honesty – this is an ethics course, after all.

All assignments must be **laser printed** and look professional.

“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. This is an ethics course and the least you can do is be ethical for the duration of this course.

“Correct use of language is one of the criteria included in the evaluation of written assignments.” MSVU Calendar

As you all know, we use the guidelines of the American Psychological Association in this department for an academic style sheet. The complete APA guide is always on reserve in the library or you can refer to the précis on my web site. In addition, there are lots of other web sites that provide excellent explanations of the details of APA style. I don't want to see any foot-noted citations or numbered reference lists etc.

Required Textbook

Parsons, Patricia J. (2004). *Ethics in Public Relations: A Guide to Best Practice*. London: Kogan Page.

Marking Scheme

Assignment	Value	Date Due Section 1	Due Date Section 2	Due Date Section 3
Personal Code of Ethics	20%	Nov. 8	Nov. 2	Oct. 27
Open for Discussion	20%	as scheduled	as scheduled	as scheduled
Reflections on Ethics Insights	25%	Dec. 8	Dec. 2	Nov. 26
Term Paper or Final Exam	35%	Nov. 22 scheduled by registrar	Nov. 16 scheduled by registrar	Nov. 17 scheduled by registrar

All assignments will be assigned a number grade marked out of the percentage of the total that it is worth. (For example, the code of ethics will be marked out of 20). All number grades will be added together and a letter grade assigned at the end of the term.

Assignment Descriptions

Personal Code of Ethics

Worth 20% of your grade for PBRL 4017, this assignment requires you to think about ethics as it applies to you both personally and professionally. Further, you must put this thinking into words by the creation for yourself of a personal code of ethics that reflects what you believe to be important (your values) and how these can find manifestation in action. The code itself should have two components: a personal code, as well as a professional code that elucidates your values related to your chosen discipline. In addition to the code, an explanatory paper indicating the thought process in which you engaged to develop these codes must accompany them. (1000-1500 words; laser printed on white bond paper, 12 pt. times roman font; title page; paginated in upper right; running footer bottom right with your name.)

Open for Discussion

In the course schedule there is a column titled “Open for Discussion.” In this column, scattered throughout the semester are topics based on specific assigned readings. This assignment, worth 20% of your final grade for PBRL 4017, requires you to work in a small team to facilitate a discussion on this topic. The discussion will last 35- 45 minutes and requires you to show evidence of background research. You will be graded on your knowledge and comprehension of the topic and relevant theoretical and practical background issues, your ability to generate discussion, and your ability to control the discussion. I reserve the right to grade each facilitator separately if necessary based on performance during the discussion.

Reflections on Ethics Insights

This assignment is worth 25% of your final grade for PBRL 4017. This assignment resembles a journal. Some time later, after each class is over (I suggest you not wait too long – that night, perhaps), you will write out your reactions to the content and discussions in class with some sense of what you personally have learned. I suggest that before handing this material in for grading, that you copy-edit it.

You will be graded on the thoughtfulness of your reflections, your ability to connect the ideas discussed in class and of course style issues will play a part. If you miss a class, you must indicate this including your reason for missing the class. You are invited to contribute reflections on missed classes based on your readings etc, but you are subject to losing marks, particularly if you miss any student-led discussions. Laser printed on white bond paper, 12 pt times roman font. No three-ring binders; either use a stapler or a flat cover.

On the first day of class, each student will select one of the following major evaluation methods. Once a method is selected, there will be no changes permitted. **None whatsoever!**

Term Paper

This is an academic discussion of public relations ethics topic of interest to you. Your thesis must be made clear in the introduction and the paper must show evidence of solid research in both the academic and the trade literature, your understanding of that research as it applies both theoretically and practically and a logical, defensible analysis of the thesis.

Use APA style, laser print it on white paper in 12 pt roman font and make sure it's between 2000 and 2200 words. This is a brief academic analysis not a dissertation. You will lose marks if it does not comply with these instructions.

Along with the completed paper, you are required to **submit complete copies of all your cited sources** outside of the ones provided in your course reading pack of which you are likely to use some pieces.

OR

Final Examination

If you choose to write a final examination, it will be scheduled by the registrar during the examination period in December. It will be based on the objectives of the course, and will rely heavily on your ability to apply information and ideas from readings (including your textbook and course reading pack), class lectures, films, and discussions. It will be open book.

Questions we'll ponder:

What are human beings really like: selfish & greedy or generous and kind?

Are some people "better" at morality than others, or is everyone equally capable of being "good"?

Are there good ways of teaching children to behave morally?

Does anyone have the right to tell anyone else what goodness and wickedness are?

Are there certain kinds of acts (like torturing children) that are always wrong?

What do you think is the best answer to the question: Why should I be a good person?

Is ethics a special kind of knowledge? If so, what sort of knowledge is it and how do we get it?

Is morality about obeying a set of rules or is it about thinking carefully about consequences?

When people say "I know murder is wrong" do they know it is wrong or do they believe it very strongly?

Typing Instructions for Term Papers

1. Laser printed on 20-24 lb **WHITE** bond paper.
2. Double space using an indent to begin paragraphs, not a double-double space between paragraphs.
3. Cover page including the following information centered: a title (not just the topic – choose a descriptive title), by you & your student number, “submitted to Professor P. Parsons in partial fulfillment of the requirements for PBRL 4017,” date, word count.
4. Use a 12 point roman font

Y 12 pt. Roman font
Not roman font
Not roman font
Not roman font

5. Use a ragged right margin **ALWAYS** and include a flush right footer in 10 point type that includes your name.
6. Put the page number in the upper right hand corner of each page except the first where it should be centered on the bottom.
7. Use sub-heads to improve the organization of the paper.
8. Double-double space before a sub-head and one double space below.
9. If a sub-head falls near the bottom of a page, ensure that there are at least two lines of copy following it or put it on a new page.

Either staple the pages together (no paper clips) or put it in a flat cover of some kind (no three-ring binders).

Read your paper out loud to your self, listening to how it sounds and do a thorough copy edit before submitting it.

It should look impeccable.

Final Major Assignment Selection

Name _____ Date: _____

Student Number: _____

Section #: _____

I, (print) _____ hereby agree to complete the following major assignment that is worth 35% of my final grade for Public Relations 4017 ("Public Relations Ethics").

I understand that under no circumstances whatsoever will I be permitted to change my selection after signing this contract. Check only one.

- I will submit an academic research paper on the date indicated in the course syllabus for my section.

Or

- I will write a final examination as scheduled by the registrar during the examination period in December.

Signature