

*[GPRL 6013]*

# PUBLIC RELATIONS: SOCIAL & ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

## *COURSE OUTLINE*

<b>Professor:</b>	XXXX
<b>Office Location:</b>	XXXX
<b>Office Hours:</b>	XXXX
<b>Phone:</b>	XXXX
<b>Fax:</b>	XXXX
<b>Email:</b>	XXXX

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Public Relations 6013 is a graduate-level course that provides you with the opportunity to analyze public relations as both an area of practice and an academic discipline. To do this, it will be necessary to examine the social construction of public relations, its public image and the reality of its practice. We do this through an examination of the development of the industry and the evolution of its body of knowledge, placing it within its historical and social contexts. We examine various models of practice and their theoretical bases, the so-called “Public Relations Process,” and the evolution of public relations as a scholarly pursuit.

An important over-arching theme encompassing this examination of public relations is the use and abuse of power inherent in the ability to influence publics and governments within a democratic society.

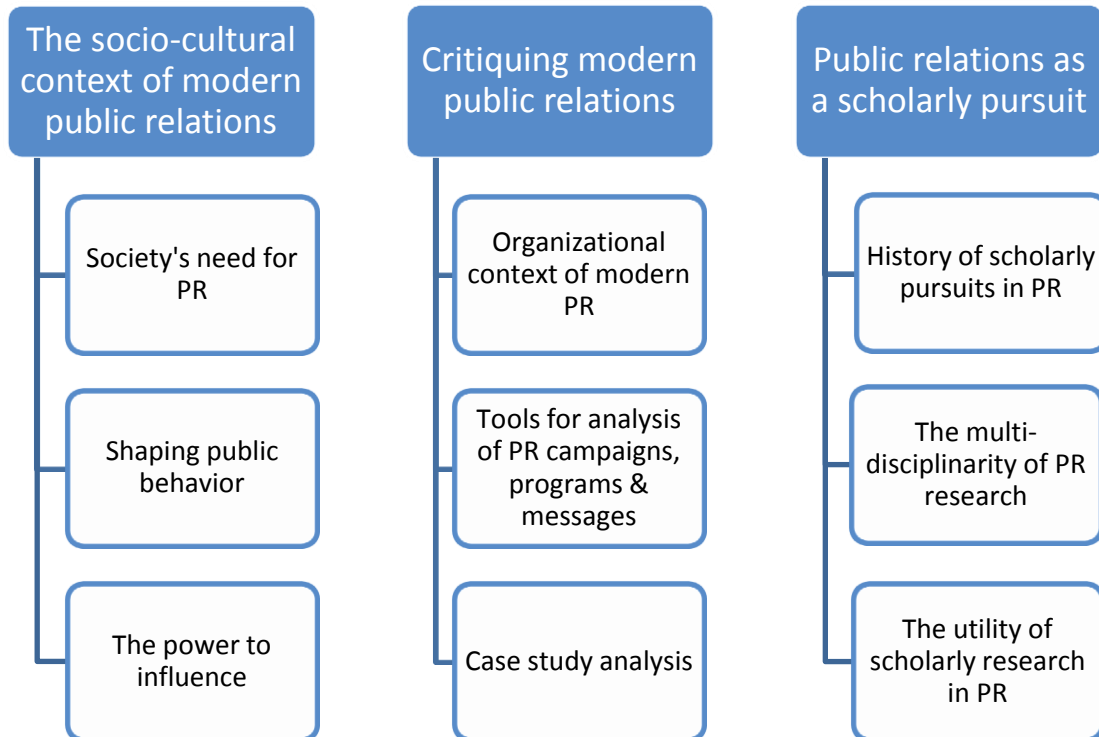
## TEACHING AND LEARNING PLATFORM

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. .

## COURSE FORMAT

The course is divided into three workshops as follows:



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

## COMMUNICATION

All non-urgent communication will be done via our virtual classroom: our Moodle site, or via email. I will also be having virtual office hours as indicated at the beginning of this document (email, telephone, Skype).

## COURSE PRE-REQUISITES

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

## OVERALL GOALS OF THIS COURSE

GPRL 6013 has three over-arching goals:

- To provide graduate students with the opportunity to examine the social and cultural development of public relations as a field of practice and as an academic discipline.
- To establish a context for understanding current and future practice issues in the field.
- To identify areas in the social and cultural contexts of public relations that require further scholarly scrutiny.

## 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 GPRL 6013, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the historical evolution of public relations as a professional practice and as a discipline of study, within the context of the industry's public image and private reality.
2. Use a critical approach to analysis of public relations and its impact on society.
3. Discuss the theoretical bases of the models of modern public relations practice.
4. Differentiate between technical and managerial practices within the field and the place of those practices in the so-called 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.
9. Demonstrate knowledge of the academic literature related to public relations.

## COURSE READING

You will need to read the following textbooks:

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.

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:

Assignment	Value	Due Date
Case Analysis for Peer Review & Discussion	30%	
Participation	30%	
Major research paper & peer review	40% (Peer review: 10%; Paper: 30%)	

## DETAILS OF ASSIGNMENTS

### 1 - CASE ANALYSIS FOR PEER REVIEW & DISCUSSION

The purposes of this assignment which is worth a total of **30%** of your final grade are as follows:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to apply a new analytical approach to a case study.
2. To evaluate your ability to analyze new concepts that they have constructed as a result of your exposure to a critical approach to the field of public relations.

### *DEFINITION OF A CASE STUDY*

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

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*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.<sup>1</sup>*

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### *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 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

Only two students may select each case, so when you have made your choice, you will post that to the case study peer review forum in Workshop 2. First come, first served.

### *INSTRUCTIONS*

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

Prepare this in one of the following ways:

1. A written document saved as a pdf.
2. A video
3. A slide presentation

When you are ready (and before the deadline) post this to the peer review forum for discussion.

## 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 engage with both your professor and your peers.
2. To provide an opportunity for further engagement in constructing your own learning;
3. To assess your ability to synthesize your understanding of the issues.

Your participation in the online discussions is worth 30% of your final grade.

## 3- MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER & PEER REVIEW

This application assignment is worth 40% of your final grade. The purposes of this assignment are as follows:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to explore the scholarly literature in 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 to explore creative ideas for future scholarly research in PR.
5. To provide you with an opportunity to be peer-reviewed.

### *INSTRUCTIONS*

1. Select a topic of interest related to one of the following general areas:
  - a. Criticism of modern public relations
  - b. Representation of public relations in popular culture
  - c. The evolution of the so-called PR 'body of knowledge'
2. Do some preliminary research.
3. Develop a thesis that you will argue in your paper.
4. Write a proposal and complete outline for your paper – include several of the preliminary scholarly sources you will use.
5. Submit the proposal at the end of Workshop 1 for feedback and approval (no grade).
6. Complete the paper.
7. Submit the paper at the end of the course on the date assigned.

## 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**. 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 and assignment centres close at 11:55 pm on the due date. With permission, late assignments may be emailed to me subject to grade reduction.
- 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](http://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>

## 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.

## 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 department chair 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/en/home/student-services/academic-advising-support/writing-resource-centre/default.aspx>
- **Distance Learning and Continuing Education** <http://www.msvu.ca/Distance/index.asp>
- **MSVU Student Services** <http://www.msvu.ca/student-affairs/index.asp>
- **Distance Learning Student guide**  
<http://www.msvu.ca/site/media/msvu/Distance%20Student%20Guide%281%29.pdf>