

Course: PRAD 562 • Section 201 • Winter 2012

Media Relations

Class Times: Thurs. 5:45 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Classroom: 14 E. Jackson, Room 1129

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Course Description:

This course is designed to facilitate a detailed understanding of the theory and practice of media relations, a core function of the public relations profession. Through readings and discussions, assignments, in-class practice cases, guest speakers, and team presentations, students will gain a strong foundation in the fundamentals of media relations. By addressing a hypothetical announcement facing a real organization, students will gain practical experience conducting an analysis of media coverage using news databases to extract key issues and influencers; developing a media list (and justifying the journalists targeted) using a media contact database; building journalist dossiers and a talking points document using social media tools and a media database; and developing a media relations briefing book, including a pitch list and journalist dossiers with key message points, personalized pitch e-mails for targeted journalists, and recommendations on spokespeople, third-party endorsers, information subsidies, and related supporting materials.

This class was developed with generous feedback and support from a variety of industry professionals and organizations, especially Joe Poulos and the Financial Communications & IR practice at Edelman Chicago. The instructor also wishes to thank Rob Ingram and Gorkana Group for providing access to the Gorkana database.

Course Objectives:

- To provide an overview of the theory and research behind the practice of modern media relations.
- To gain an understanding that the practice of modern media relations is strategic, purposeful, and research-driven. The pitch and the interview remain essential, but are just one part of a larger process.
- To examine how the practice of media relations is changing with the growth of social media, citizen journalism, shrinking newsrooms, and fragmented audiences through interaction with guest speakers.
- To practice developing and applying media relations strategies and tactics by completing assignments towards developing a media relations briefing book based on a hypothetical announcement.
- To enhance presentation and writing skills in communicating persuasively, clearly, and successfully.

Required Reading Materials:

There is no required textbook for the course. Due to the dynamic and changing nature of the practice of media relations, no one book is comprehensive and current enough to be worth the investment for this course.

Instead, this course is based on a selection of weekly readings drawn from industry and academic sources. All readings are available in PDF form or via the Web through the course's section on Desire2Learn (D2L).

blog, book, site, tool, report, etc. to the class with 2) specific examples and implications for the practice of media relations and public relations. Your presentation will be timed and points will be deducted for going over. You are encouraged to use the class computer as a visual aid. PowerPoint is optional and, if used, you should not be overly reliant on it. Part of your grade will be based on class participation and involvement so a discussion question or two should be prepared. An assignment sheet will be provided.

2) Class Attendance and Participation (30 points)

As this is a learner-centered course, your attendance and active participation in class is essential. You are expected to always arrive for class on time (arriving late or leaving early is the same as being absent). Attendance will be taken each class by passing around a sign-in sheet. **E-mail me (mragas@depaul.edu) in advance if you plan to miss a class for a work, family, or health reason and I will most likely count this as an *excused absence*.** If I don't hear from you in advance, I will record your absence as an *unexcused absence*.

You only have the potential to earn an "A" on the class attendance and participation part of your grade if you miss one class or less AND you *consistently* contribute to class discussion *throughout the quarter*. Participation is based on the quality and quantity of your contributions. **IMPORTANT: It is your responsibility to sign-in. If your signature isn't on the sign-in sheet, you will be marked as absent. I will always try to remind you.**

2) Reflection Paper – "The Future of Media Relations" (30 points)

Near the start of the quarter, you will write a 3-5 page double-spaced reflection paper (plus a reference section) responding to several assigned readings discussing the changing face of media relations and public relations. You will incorporate into this reflection paper several additional articles that you find on your own on this topic. The goal of this reflection paper is, based on these readings, as well as your own personal and professional experience, to identify what you believe are the top three-to-five trends shaping the practice of media relations in the years ahead. The sections of the paper discussing each of these trends should be clearly labeled and the paper should demonstrate mastery of the assigned and additional readings that you have incorporated. The paper should include a logical introduction and conclusion section, as well as a reference page of sources at the end. Please be consistent with the formatting and citation style chosen. An assignment sheet will be provided.

4) Media Coverage Analysis Team Assignment (20 points)

In this initial team assignment, you will conduct an analysis of recent news media coverage of a particular organization using Lexis-Nexis and other news database services. Through completing this assignment, you will gain familiarity with how the news media has been covering your organization and what sources the media has been quoting in its coverage of your organization. You will identify and prioritize the key issues and sources (who does the media deem as opinion leaders?) appearing in the news regarding your organization; examine which media outlets have been providing the most/least coverage; and explore how the patterns of coverage may differ across outlets. In addition, you will examine the recent news releases issued by your organization, identifying the key issues and spokespeople highlighted in these releases and whether the emphases in the releases are congruent with the emphases in the media coverage. An assignment sheet will be provided and team member evaluations will factor into your grade.

5) Media List Team Assignment (20 points)

Your team will be given information about a hypothetical announcement that will soon be made by the organization you researched in the first team assignment. Using Gorkana, a professional media contact database

used by widely by corporate communication professionals, you will develop a media contact list that is appropriate for making this announcement. Leveraging your prior analysis of coverage, you will justify why each journalist/media outlet was selected and think about an appropriate story angle (i.e., why will this story be of interest to this journalist and their audience? Why will they care?) tied to the announcement for each selected journalist/outlet. An emphasis will be placed on the strategic rationale underlying the choices made in building your contact list. An assignment sheet will be provided and team member evaluations will factor in your grade.

6) Journalist Dossier Team Assignment (20 points)

Just as a good journalist always does detailed background research on the interviewee, a good media relations person always does background research on the interviewer (i.e., the journalist) to anticipate questions, the flow of the interview, and the perspective of the journalist and their outlet. With this in mind, using publicly available information gleaned through a combination of online news databases, websites, and social networking sites, you will build a dossier for the top journalist on your media contact list. A second high-profile journalist will be selected by the professor and analyzed by all of the teams. Through conducting this background research and reviewing clips of these journalists, you will also create Q&A briefing guides to go along with the dossiers. These guides will provide your organization (and particularly its spokespeople) with insights in advance of the interview into which questions the journalist may ask and the appropriate talking points to stay on message in response. An assignment sheet will be provided and team member evaluations will factor into your grade.

7) Media Relations Briefing Book Assignment/Presentation (40 points)

In this final assignment, you will synthesize your existing findings and combine them with additional materials to create a briefing book that will help guide the hypothetical announcement by your organization. Specifically, this final report will include a concise review of recent media coverage and news releases issued by your organization (e.g., media coverage analysis team assignment); a review of the “friends and foes” surrounding this announcement (i.e., opinion leader and third party endorsement discussion); a copy of your media contact list (e.g., media list builder team assignment); the top three journalists targeted for this announcement along with your justifications/rationale (e.g., combination of information from your media list assignment and journalist dossier data) and Q&A/talking points guide; personalized e-mail pitches incorporating your message points for the top three journalists you are targeting; and a summary of the information subsidies you plan to provide to bring this story to life for the journalists and their audience. This final assignment will include a team presentation of this information (~20 minutes) followed by questions. Media relations professional will attend as judges. An assignment sheet will be provided. Team member evaluations will factor into your final grade.

Deadlines for Presentations and Reports

Deadlines are real. Late work will be reduced by one letter grade for each 24 hour period it is not turned in or does not follow the submission format. Work turned in during the middle or end of class (this includes making blog posts after the start of class!) is considered late. This pertains to both team and individual work. As you know, in a professional environment, the consequences of missing deadlines are much worse.

IMPORTANT: Assigned individual and team presentations *cannot* be made up at a later date. You will receive a zero if you miss a previously assigned presentation deadline so please plan accordingly!

Academic Honesty

Cheating and plagiarism (literary or artistic theft), copying someone else's work, or other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any case of academic dishonesty will be considered grounds for *an automatic failing grade in the course*. Having someone else do your work for you is also considered academic dishonesty. University guidelines will be followed for any offenses. Please don't put yourself in this situation.

Please refer to the Student Handbook for more details: <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html>

Inclusiveness

This class encourages the free exchange of ideas. Every attempt is made to make all course material non-sexist, diverse, and multi-cultural. Should I ever fail to meet this goal, please let me know immediately.

Please be respectful of your classmates. A great way to learn is through class discussions. I love the exchange of ideas. It's fine to disagree, but it's important that everyone stays respectful and civil to differing viewpoints.

Teamwork

The practice of media relations and public relations is a team sport. Even when I've done work as a solo consultant, I still ultimately work in a team, as I must successfully collaborate with an organization's communication department, management, other service providers, etc. Half of your total possible points in this class are based on collaborative team assignments. For every team assignment, you will have the opportunity to evaluate your teammates, thereby providing an added incentive for everyone on the team to carry their load.

The Writing Center

Consider visiting the Writing Center to discuss your assignments. You may schedule appointments (30 or 50 minutes) on an as-needed or weekly basis, scheduling up to 3 hours worth of appointments per week. Online services include Feedback-by-Email and IM conferencing. All writing center services are *free*.

Writing Center tutors are specially selected and trained graduate and undergraduate students who can help you at almost any stage of your writing. They will not do your work for you, but they can help you focus and develop your ideas, review your drafts, and polish your writing. They can answer questions about grammar, mechanics, different kinds of writing styles, and documentation formats. They also can answer questions and provide feedback online, through IM/webcam chats and email. Obviously, the tutors won't necessarily be familiar with every class or subject, but they are able to provide valuable help from the perspective of an interested and careful reader as well as a serious and experienced student-writer.

Schedule your appointments with enough time to think about and use the feedback you'll receive. Bring your assignment handout and other relevant materials to your appointments.

Quick Links & Locations:

To schedule an appointment at the Center's LPC and Loop locations: <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/html/sched/WCOnline.html>

To schedule real-time conversations with IM and/or webcam:

<http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/html/sched/im.htm>

To request feedback by Email: <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/html/sched/email.html>

Loop Campus Office: 1620 Lewis Center, 312.362.6726

Lincoln Park Office: 250 McGaw, 773.325.4272

For more information, visit: <http://www.depaul.edu/~writing/>

Students with Disabilities

Students requesting classroom accommodation for disabilities should provide me with written documentation from the appropriate university offices regarding the specific disability and accommodation requested during the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential. For more information, contact the Productive Learning Strategies Program (PLuS) for LD, AD/HD: <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus>, (773) 325-1677 or the Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) for all other disabilities:

<http://www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/studentwithdisabilities>, (773) 325-1677. Offices: Student Center #370.

Final Notes:

- The professor will make every effort to adhere to this class schedule and grading system, but reserves the right to make necessary changes.
- While laptop, netbooks, tablets, etc. are welcome for taking notes during class, please DO NOT use them to Facebook, IM, email, etc. during class (unless of course you're visiting our blog ☺).
- No reading of newspapers, magazines, books, etc. during class. While I appreciate your support and passion for journalism, it is distracting and disrespectful to your classmates and the professor.
- Please turn your phones to vibrate when in class unless they are needed for emergency purposes. Visibly texting or checking email during class is again distracting and disrespectful to everyone else in the class.
- This class is challenging, but in the end it is rewarding and helps prepare you with knowledge and skills for the successful practice of media relations. If you notice yourself having trouble, please see me immediately. Also feel free to approach me about any concerns you might have.
- Again, the following dates and topics are a good faith attempt at providing you with a tentative schedule, but please note that they are not etched in stone. We will adapt as needed to circumstances.
- If you cannot meet with me during office hours, please see me after class, generally we can meet then, or find another time that works for both of us. If you do drop by during office hours, if you e-mail me in advance regarding your question(s), you are likely to get a more detailed answer in person.
- Generally, email is the fastest way to reach me, followed by my office phone. If you have an emergency or need an immediate response, please feel free to try me on my cell phone.
- Media relations is my favorite area of PR and I look forward to teaching this class each year!

Tentative Class Schedule

- Week 1:** 1/5: Course Overview and Introduction
- *Review of syllabus and the class blog assignment*
 - *Sign-up sheets to select blog assignment dates; begin thinking about forming teams*
 - *Guest speaker last hour: Edelman media relations*
- Week 2:** 1/12: Media Relations Theory and Research: What Have We Found?
- *Review first team assignment (media coverage) and review reflection paper assignment*
 - *Review news databases (Lexis-Nexis, ProQuest, etc.) and practice case*
 - *Sign-up sheet for forming teams for team assignments*
 - *Schedule posted for class blog assignment (blog post and presentation)*
- Week 3:** 1/19: The Future of Media Relations: What Stays the Same? What Changes?
- ***Future of Media Relations reflection paper due (hard copy only)***
 - *Class discussion of trends and future of media relations*
 - *Class blog assignment presentations begin (start of class)*
 - *In-class time for teams to meet on first assignment*
- Week 4:** 1/26: Newsworthiness and the Production of News
- ***Media coverage analysis assignment due (hard copy only)***
 - *Class discussion on media coverage analysis team findings*
 - *Guest panel last hour: professional journalist perceptions of media relations*
- Week 5:** 2/2: The Media Agenda and Corporate Reputation
- *In-class time for teams to meet on second assignment*
 - *Distribute login information by team for Gorkana database*
- Optional:** 2/8 **Guest lecture by Aylwin Lewis, CEO of Potbelly Sandwich Shop (Daley, LL 102)**
- Week 6:** 2/9: Source Credibility and Third-Party Endorsement
- *Review second team assignment (build media list for announcement scenario)*
 - *In-class practice using media contact database for research (Gorkana)*
 - *Guest panel last hour: PR professionals talk about media relations*
- Week 7:** 2/16: Conducting Media Intelligence and Preparing for the Interview
- ***Media list builder team assignment due (hard copy only)***
 - *Practice using the Web, social media, and Gorkana for media intelligence*
 - *Review third team assignment (building dossiers for the top journalists targeted)*
- Week 8:** 2/23: Media Relations and the Social Web
- *Overview of final assignment (media relations briefing book/presentation)*
 - *Class discussion and exercise on media relations and the social web*
 - *Guest speaker: Michael Beno, Proof Integrated Communications*
- Week 9:** 3/1: Media Pitching, Catching, and Information Subsidies
- ***Journalist dossiers team assignment due (hard copy only)***
 - *Class discussion and exercise on developing information subsidies*
 - *Guest speaker last hour: Edelman shares professional dossier example(s)*
- Week 10:** 3/8: Review Day: Final team presentation and report (media relations briefing book)
- *Extended in-class time for questions and teams to meet on final assignment*
 - *Reviewing what we learned from class blog post/presentation assignment*
 - *Team meetings with professor / preliminary review of final project work*
- EXAM WEEK:** 3/15: ***Media Relations Briefing Book team presentations/reports due (hard copy only)***
- *Report, copy of slides, and team evaluations due at the start of class*
 - *Guest judge(s): Edelman media relations team member(s)*

Note: Please be prepared to discuss all assigned readings by the class date for which they have been assigned.