Introduction to Public Relations

The field of public relations is not for the faint of heart, nor is it for a person who wants an 8 to 5 workday. That’s a job; public relations is a career requiring long hours, commitment, dedication, diplomacy, and a broad pool of knowledge. Too often students “get into” public relations without knowing exactly what it is. It sounds fun and glamorous. Sometimes. But there are many misconceptions about our chosen profession. If we who practice public relations don’t understand it fully, how can we expect others to understand it? How can we expect our senior managers to realize that we are a necessary, vital, productive part of the organization and that we are essential to the success and health of the organization? The objective of this course is to help you understand the nature of this multi-faceted profession. We will study its history, practices, and ethics and clear up the misconceptions. We will explore the trends and areas of specialization within the field.

Major Outcomes:
To successfully complete a Public Relations major, students will demonstrate the ability to:
1) write persuasively, in a variety of formats, for a variety of media, 2) use diverse research methods and analyze data to develop and support various PR functions, 3) apply PR strategies and tactics to solve problems creatively, 4) use PR principles and practices to guide management effectively and ethically, and 5) practice oral communication skills professionally in a variety of situations

Course Objectives:
In this course you will: 1) develop your knowledge of the field of public relations, 2) define the terms used by public relations practitioners, 3) discuss the legal and ethical issues surrounding public relations, 4) define public relations objectives, strategies, and tactics and use them to develop a public relations campaign, 5) write messages designed to effectively reach various publics, 6) create a public relations campaign for a client, 7) work effectively with others, and 8) practice your presentation skills.

Required Text:

Work Requirements and Grading:
Your ability to function as an effective public relations professional will depend, to a great extent, on your ability to assess situations and issues and to discover the problems and opportunities they present. Therefore, you will read and discuss famous and “infamous” public
relations cases. Effective PR people must also be “up” on current events, so each reading quiz that you take will include some questions on current events. You will also be asked to discuss, intelligently, these events at various points during the term.

We will have regular quizzes on the assigned readings in Wilcox, sometimes before the material is covered in class; it is essential that you come to class having read the assignment. In addition, anything we discuss in class or any presentation given by another student/speaker is fair game for the quizzes/exams. You will also take a midterm and a final exam. As you can see, it will be impossible to earn a good grade if you don’t attend class and keep up with your reading assignments.

Toward the end of the semester, you will present your Campaign Pitch Project Your “public relations agency” (group of 2-3) will be required to plan and pitch a public relations program that you design for a specific client. You must include all the stages that go into designing an effective public relations program. The final project will include a written report detailing the plan and a group presentation to pitch your plan. Your final grade for this project will consist of both individual and group components. Occasionally, there will be class time to work on this project but it will require your group to meet outside of class.

Finally, since there is an enormous amount of writing required in public relations, good writing skills are essential. Therefore, there will be a number of written assignments during the term, including the aforementioned campaign pitch project, which is a significant part of your grade. The grading for these assignments breaks down this way:

25% Exams
20% Quizzes
25% Miscellaneous assignments/participation
30% Campaign pitch project

“The Golden Rules”:

- Westminster students are expected to attend all classes, unless specifically excused for some exceptional reason.

- All assignments must be completed on time in order to pass this course.

- There are no make-ups on quizzes, exams, or in-class work, unless you have been excused by me from that class, in advance. Make-up work must be submitted within a week of your return to class.

- Writing is a significant part of public relations work. Grammar is a significant part of writing. (Yes, this includes spelling!) Poorly written assignments of any kind will not pass.

- In accordance with Westminster College’s policy, violations of academic integrity include cheating, misconduct, plagiarism, and providing false information. Please refer to your student handbook for a detailed description of Westminster’s Academic Integrity.
Policy. Work that violates the college’s policy will receive a zero and the assignment or test may be turned over to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for further disciplinary action. Please remember that violating the Academic Integrity Policy may be grounds for dismissal from the college. If you have questions about properly citing source material or what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me. Turning in someone else’s work—whether it is a published text or a roommate’s research paper—as your own constitutes plagiarism and will be punished according to the rules laid out in the Student Handbook.

- Cell Phones & Computers: As a matter of courtesy, all cell phones must be turned off when you enter the classroom, unless otherwise noted. Please refrain from texting during class; it is disruptive to your classmates. Students who are texting in class will be marked absent. If you have your cell phone out during a test, the test will be confiscated and you will receive a zero on the test. I do not mind if students use computers for taking notes during class. However, I reserve the right to prohibit computer use during class if I feel a student is using the computer for other purposes during class or if I think the use of a computer is disruptive in any way. Cell phones must be put away when class begins (unless otherwise instructed).

A Message from the Academic Success Center

Wondering how to better tackle your reading assignments? Looking for new ways to prepare for your tests? Worried about keeping up in all of your classes? Afraid to ask for help? You’re not the first Westminster College student to have these issues on your mind!

The Academic Success Center can help you with free academic support, including drop-in tutoring hours and individual tutoring for specific subjects, as well as individualized academic consultations to help you with goal setting, time management, note-taking, reading strategies and other skills that will help you reach your academic goals.

Located on the fourth floor of Thompson-Clark Hall, the center also offers rooms for individual or group studying on a first-come, first-serve basis until 10 p.m. every night. For more information, visit www.westminster.edu/academics/learning-center/index.cfm, or contact Coordinator Jessica Shelenberger by visiting TC 412, by emailing shelenjp@westminster.edu or by calling (724) 946-6700.

*Tentative Reading/Assignment Schedule:
Week 1    Intro to course
1/14-1/18 Wilcox: Ch. 1

Week 2    Ch. 3
1/23-1/25 Martin Luther King Day (2/21)—no class

Week 3    Chs. 2, 14
1/28-2/1
Week 4  Ch. 15  2/4-2/8
Week 5  Chs. 5, 6  2/11-2/15
Week 6  Chs. 7, 8  2/18-2/22
Week 7  Midterm Exam  2/25-3/1
Week 8  Chs. 9, 11  3/4-3/8
Week 9  Spring Break  3/11-3/15
Week 10  Chs. 10, 13  3/18-3/22
Week 11  Chs. 4, 16  3/25-3/29
Week 12  Chs. 17, 21  4/1-4/5
Week 13  Chs. 19, 20  4/8-4/12
Week 14  Ch. 12  4/15-4/17
Week 15  URAC (4/24)—no class  4/23-4/26
Week 16  Campaign pitch projects due  4/29-5/3

*All dates/assignments are subject to change.