Public Relations and the Media

Course Description

This course focuses on the often contentious yet critical relationship between public relations and the press. Neither can exist without the other, which makes it all the more important that PR professionals have a thorough understanding of the domestic and foreign press. Knowing how the media works and what reporters need from public relations people helps you develop effective media relations programs for the clients you represent. Whether you are a full-time media relations specialist or a PR practitioner in general, there is no avoiding this job. At some point in your career, you will have to meet the press. Media relations is the “hot seat” of public relations. In this position, you are often the only link between two demanding masters: your organization and the reporters knocking at your door. Today, a media relations position requires not only good writing skills but also perceptive counseling ability and effective speaking skills; comprehensive knowledge of the PR field; specialization in media studies; broad understanding of organizational, national and international affairs; and outstanding strategic thinking and tactical skills.

In short, media relations specialists must understand the media as well as they understand their own organizations in an effort to build mutually beneficial relationships.

Required Text


Course Requirements

This course is part lecture and part workshop. Our text provides a clear, detailed approach to actually doing the job of media relations from both a strategic and tactical viewpoint. It is a handbook for those who must meet the press. We will use role-playing to apply these strategies and tactics to a variety of hypothetical situations in class. I may tape some of these scenarios and play them back for immediate critique.

In this class, you will learn to “pitch” the media, build relationships with journalists, organize and run a media relations office and create an effective media relations program. As usual, you will read the news on a daily basis. In addition, you will take quizzes, participate in lots of in-class activities, make presentations to the class, and take a midterm and final exam.

Outside of class, you will learn more about media relations by posting regularly on an industry blog and by forming a professional connection with a media relations specialist on LinkedIn.

Desired Outcomes:

By the end of the course, successful students will demonstrate the ability to:

• write persuasively, in a variety of formats, for a variety of media.
• use diverse research methods and analyze data to develop and support various PR functions.
• apply PR strategies and tactics to solve problems creatively.
• use PR principles and practices to guide management effectively and ethically.
• practice oral communication skills professionally in a variety of situations.

While we will produce assignments that address each of these goals throughout the semester, the final project incorporates all of these outcomes.

Grading
• Quizzes 20%
• Exams 25%
• Assignments & participation 25%
• Media plan project 30%

General Guidelines and Policies

• Come to class prepared, ready to participate. Stay on top of your reading assignments and what’s going on in the world. Your contributions are vital to the success of this class. If you miss more than three classes, regardless of the reason, your final grade will be lowered by half a letter grade.

• In-class activities cannot be made up for any reason.

• Writing is the most important skill in public relations work. Therefore, grammatical errors will significantly lower your grade on any assignment.

• The nature of the course and the subject matter (and the business itself) dictate that you will have many deadlines. Failure to meet these deadlines will result in a reduction of your grade.

• Turning in someone else’s work—whether it is from a published text or a roommate’s homework—as your own constitutes plagiarism and will be punished according to the rules laid out in the Student Handbook.

• Turn off your cell phones and put them away BEFORE class begins. If you are texting in class or looking at your phone, you will be considered absent.

Reading List and Major Assignments*

1/15-1/17 Introduction to the course Preface in On Deadline
1/24-/1/26 Chapter 1: Getting Started
1/29-1/31 Chapter 2: News
2/5-2/7  Chapter 3: Tools of the Trade
2/12-2/14 Chapter 4: Reporters
2/19-2/21 Chapter 5: Spokespersons
2/26-2/28 Chapter 6: Ethics
3/5-3/7 Midterm exam
3/12-3/14 Spring Break
3/19-3/21 Chapter 9: Crisis Planning
3/26-3/28 Chapter 7: Media Events
4/2-4/4 Chapter 8: Going Global

4/16 Easter Break
4/25 Chapter 11: The Future
   *Tuesday is Monday!!
   *URAC (no class Wed.)
4/30-5/2 Final exam
   Last day of classes
Final period Media plan presentation

*This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor, so stay tuned!