

PUR4932 – Government Public Relations

Course Number: 31459
Spring 2022
Wednesdays, 9:35-10:25 a.m.
Weimer 2050

Instructor: Cindy Spence
Email: cindyrspace@ufl.edu
Office hours: By appointment
Phone: 813-597-7128

Prerequisite: PUR3000 with a C or better

Required Texts

No required texts

The professor will provide or assign readings over the course of the semester. Readings should be finished in advance of the class for which they are listed.

Course Description

Government spokespeople are critical to the public's understanding of what the government does and how it operates, but conducting communications for the government is vastly different from practicing it for corporations. Governments are tasked with protecting public health, safety and the environment and ultimately work for the public. In this course, we'll explore both how government entities can communicate more effectively with the public, the media and advocacy groups.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon completion, students will:

- Learn the tools to effectively serve the public interest as government communicators
- Develop an overall understanding of the role of government PIOs
- Develop a basic knowledge of the variety of public information positions in governmental agencies
- Learn the basics of the legal framework within which a government PIO operates
- Understand the roles of stakeholders (nonprofit organizations, elected and nonelected government officials, the PIO, the public)

College of Journalism and Communications Objectives

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that by graduation all students should be able to:

- apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located;
- demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

- demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;
- present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

KEY COURSE POLICIES

Instructor Interaction

Please feel free to make an appointment to see me. The best way to reach me is by e-mail. I check my e-mail account regularly, but please do not expect a response by e-mail after normal business hours/over the weekend. If I have not written back within 48 hours, please send your email again. As my email is considered a state public record, I do not discuss grades or any student records issues via e-mail. Please schedule a meeting with me to discuss these issues.

Late or Missed Work

Deadlines for each assignment will be given and students are expected to meet them. Late assignments will automatically lose a full letter grade for each day it is late (e.g. B to a C). Some consideration, however, might be given (at the discretion of the instructor) if there are extenuating circumstances such as prolonged hospitalization, family death, or extended individual sickness; however, you need to notify the instructor before the deadline is missed, not after the fact.

Attendance

This course focuses on class participation and group discussion. Your attendance is an important aspect of this course. Excessive absences will harm your grade. You are responsible for notifying the professor in advance of the cause of your absence and, if it is due to illness, provide a note from your medical provider. For further information on attendance policy, please consult: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>.

Email Policy

As a state employee, my email is considered a public record, and can be requested via an open-records request. Because of this, you should not email things that you would be uncomfortable with anyone else reading (personal information, information about grades, etc.). In general, face-to-face meetings tend to take less time, and result in less confusion than emailed conversations. While you are welcome to email me, I may indicate that you need an in-person meeting depending on the complexity of the issue. Also, please be aware that email is considered formal communication, and it is important to practice professionalism. Make sure that you do not treat email as text (i.e., don't use text abbreviations) and never email something that you would not say to your boss' face.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with me.

I will document and report all honor code violations, including cheating and plagiarism. The minimum penalty for a violation of the honor code is a zero on the assignment or exam, but may be higher depending on the severity of the violation.

Professionalism

As PR students I expect you to maintain a high level of professionalism in all of our interactions. This includes being courteous and respectful to all members of the course. Being respectful includes making sure you are not distracting to others via your cell phone or computer usage, talking with others during lecture, or arriving or leaving late – practice your professionalism now!

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center.](#) It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Recording Lectures

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations [here](#). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students [here](#).

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Grading

Each of you will be graded on the same criteria. Grades are awarded on the basis of quality, not the amount of time expended. Grades will be posted on Canvas -- it is your responsibility to check on your progress throughout the semester.

Grade components are:

Attendance and Active Participation: 50%

Attendance and active participation are mandatory. Students will be expected to participate in various interactive exercises and to be fully engaged at all times unless cleared in advance with the professor. Active participation includes respectfully engaging in discussion with guest speakers. Each absence after the drop/add period will result in reduction in the grade for attendance. After due warning, the professor may prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a lower or failing grade for excessive absences; please note: more than two unexcused absences during the semester will be considered "excessive absences." You are responsible for notifying the professor in advance of the cause of your absence when possible and, if it is due to illness, provide a note from your medical provider. For further information on attendance policy, please consult: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>.

Individual Assignments: 50%

Individual assignments will provide an opportunity for you to explore various aspects of Government Public Relations. These will include:

- Brief reports on selected topics (selected in consultation with professor)
- A brief precis on elements of assigned readings or discussions with speakers
- Rewrite of a press release
- Case study

Grading for the course follows current UF grading policies for assigning grade points (see [here](#)).

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A	94.0-100%	C	74.0-76.99%
A-	90.0-93.99%	C-	70.0-73.99%
B+	87.0-89.99%	D+	67.0-69.99%
B	84.0-86.99%	D	64.0-66.99%
B-	80.0-83.99%	D-	60.0-63.99%
C+	77.0-79.99%	E	below 60%

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Jan. 5 Course overview

What types of PIO jobs exist in the public sector at the local, state and federal level? What is the government's – and hence, the PIO's – obligation to the public? How does a PIO straddle this middle ground? Roles: communicators, lobbyists, grassroots organizers and researchers. What questions do students hope the course will answer?

Jan. 12

The federal government and role of PIOs. The Hatch Act and other legal and ethical requirements of federal employment. Functions of state and local government, and role of PIOs.

Read: Mediated Access: Journalists' Perceptions of Federal Public Information Officer Media Control <http://spj.org/pdf/reporters-survey-on-federal-PAOs.pdf>

The Nation blog: Scott McClellan = John Dean?

Jan. 19

This week, we'll delve into the structure and operations of nonprofits and public interest advocacy organizations, which sometimes partner with governments and other times take a more adversarial approach with an aim to influence local, state or federal government policy. We'll talk about how these organizations work and communicate and how government communicators can work effectively with them.

Read: Nonprofit Organizations (Definition and Examples). Learning to Give. Retrieved from <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/nonprofit-organizations-definition-and-examples>.

Foundation Lists (2021). What is a Nonprofit? Explanation of the types of nonprofits, definition, and the difference between "Public Charities" and "Foundations." (Aug. 13, 2021). Foundation List. Retrieved from <https://www.foundationlist.org/news/what-is-a-nonprofit-the-types-of-nonprofits-definitions/>

Speaker: Angela Bradbery, Frank Karel Endowed Chair in Public Interest Communications, UF CJC

Jan. 26

Communicating about government budgets, key budget terms, explaining complex concepts to a lay audience. [MOU5] How advocacy organizations influence the budget process.

Read: Education Writers Association Guide to Reading a District Budget (3 pages)

Feb. 2

The legal landscape: The First Amendment, free speech rights of public employees, social media "blocking" cases

Read: Government Use of Social Media, from the First Amendment Encyclopedia. Will add a column from The Conversation, perhaps a news article as well. The recent UF issue is likely to come up here.

Texas Bar Journal, Blocked in the Digital Age

Speaker: Frank LoMonte, director of the Brechner Center for Freedom of Information, UF CJC

Feb. 9

The legal landscape: Open government laws, federal vs. state, what do they apply to? Mechanics of managing FOI requests and common friction points. Management of “open data.” How advocacy groups can use open records requests effectively.

Read:

Speaker: Frank LoMonte, director of the Brechner Center for Freedom of Information, UF CJC (and he is inviting Ginger McCall)

Feb. 16

The unique settings of law enforcement agencies.

Read: Brechner Center White Paper: Transparency and Media Relations in High-Profile Police Cases (34 pages).

Read: The Los Angeles Times, Police PR machine under scrutiny for inaccurate reporting, alleged pro-cop bias

Read: The Vallejo Sun, The Vacaville PR firm influencing police narratives across California

Feb. 23

Working for elected officials: Campaign vs. governmental roles.

The limitations of advocacy organizations on promoting candidates.

Read: Reading from Wayne

March 2

External communications -- how government communicators should build relationships with traditional and nontraditional media, how to build/lose/rebuild credibility.

Read: No reading

March 9: Spring Break

No class

March 16

Internal communications – how to work with others in your agency to explain your role and help them do their jobs while being a bridge to the public.

Read: No reading

March 23

We'll explain how public interest communications dovetails with government communications, and we'll dive into a few public interest communications/strategic communications concepts that are applicable to government communicators as well.

Read: Kristof, N. (2009, Nov. 30). Nicholas Kristof's Advice for Saving the World. *Outside*. <https://www.outsideonline.com/1909636/nicholas-kristofs-advice-saving-world>

From George Lakoff's *The all new don't think of an elephant; know your values and frame the debate*, please read: "Reframing is Social Change" (Introduction); and "Framing the Unframed" (Chapter 2).

Speaker: Angela Bradbery, Frank Karel Endowed Chair in Public Interest Communications, UF CJC

March 30

Many government social media accounts are stodgy, one-way streets that violate all the best practices of using digital media to engage people. We'll explore how government agencies can use digital media effectively to inform and engage, and ultimately help advance the public interest.

Read: No reading

April 6

Crisis management: Case studies

Read: Chapter in *The Communications Golden Hour*

April 13

Lessons learned from COVID-19

Read: Comparison of news stories/press releases

April 20: Classes End

Wrapup, postmortem on class.