

# Syllabus: Internal Communications and Employee Engagement

FALL 2023

## **ABOUT THE COURSE**

### *INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION*

**Professor:** Renee Mitson (PhD Student, M.A.)

I'm a third year PhD student in the Public Relations Department. My research areas are organizational leadership (internal public relations) and emerging technology. I am also interested in female executive communication and leadership research of underrepresented groups.

I have two M.A.'s (media and mass communication) and a BA in public relations and film. I have also worked for over a decade in corporate communication and public relations representing high-end consumer products. Some highlights include working for TED Talks, Yelp, Electrolux, Burger King, Cornell University, and Hasbro Toys (I worked on My Little Pony).

This course was originally designed by Dr. Rita Men who is on sabbatical and will be having a beautiful baby in the Spring. I am her advisee and work and conduct research with her closely so I was selected to teach her course as I am the closest to the material. I am so excited to be teaching this course and sharing it with you all!

Course Designed By: Rita Linjuan Men, Ph.D., APR, Associate Professor, Department of Public Relations

**Office:** N/A - can meet by appointment

**Phone:** N/A

**E-mail:** [reneemitson@ufl.edu](mailto:reneemitson@ufl.edu)

### **Office Hours:**

By appointment - email me anytime. I find that when I set office hours some students have class during that time so I would rather set up a time individually that works for you as-needed. I'm very flexible as to how we meet - it can be in person, on Zoom, over the phone, on gchat - however is easiest for you.

### ***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

Employees have long been recognized as the No. 1 stakeholder of the organizations. Especially in this increasingly connected, globalized, and transparent digital age, the line between internal and external is blurred. Effective internal communication is critical for the success of an organization. This course focuses on the influential roles that communication managers play to address the issues, challenges, and opportunities facing internal stakeholders. It integrates theories, research insights, practices, as well as current issues and cases into a comprehensive

guide for future internal communication managers and organizational leaders on how to communicate effectively with internal stakeholders, build beneficial relationships, and engage employees in the fast-changing business and media environment. Through lectures, discussions, and work sessions, students will be equipped with effective strategies, tactics, and tools to be able to act as an internal communication strategist.

### ***COURSE OBJECTIVES***

This course will teach you to:

1. Discuss the basic principles of internal communication management, as related to topics of internal public segmentation, ethics, culture, communication strategies, channels, and measurement
2. Counsel organizational leaders such as the C-Suite and supervisors on how to communicate effectively
3. Apply the strategies, techniques, and tools required to engage employees, with specific emphasis on digital and social capabilities
4. Develop a standard of excellence in internal communications by analyzing “real life,” award-winning cases
5. Create an internal communication plan applying strategic and creative thinking

### ***REQUIRED TEXT***

Men, L. R., & Bowen, S. (2017). Excellence in Internal Communication Management. Business Expert Press, New York.

### ***CONTINUING READING***

- [The Institute for Public Relations' Organizational Communication Research Center](#)
- [The International Association of Business Communication](#)
- [PRSA](#)

### ***COMMUNICATION METHODS FOR ONLINE STUDENTS***

The instructor works normal weekday hours (i.e., Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.). If you email during this time, you may expect a reply in 24 hours. (*Note: Normally, I reply as soon as I see your email. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions!* )

Please do not ask questions in the “comments” section of an assignment. The instructor does not get an individual ping when a comment is left, so I will not know that they are there and so will not be able to respond in a timely manner.

For technical issues with Canvas, please contact E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2), e-mail [Learningsupport@ufl.edu](mailto:Learningsupport@ufl.edu), or visit <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>

## **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

Students need to have access to a computer with a microphone and a camera and an internet. Students need to know how to use computers and create and work with Microsoft Word documents. You will need to introduce yourself via video post.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

### *Students with Special Needs*

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

### *Course Evaluations*

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

### *Academic Honesty*

The University of Florida Honor Code applies to all activities associated with this class.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. You can also review information on [Academic Honesty](#) in detail.

### *Religious Observance*

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.

### *Attendance and Make-Ups*

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with [university policies](#).

### **Respect for Diversity Statement**

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.

### **GRADING**

#### *Distribution of Points*

Grades are *earned* via five modes: (1) Assignments; (2) Activities or exercises; (3) Discussions; (4) Exam (5) A final internal communication plan [group].

<b>Area</b>	<b>Percent of Grade</b>
Assignments	50%
Exam	25%
Internal Communication Outline	25%
Total Possible Points	100%

#### *Grading Scale*

100-93 A; 92-90 A-; 89-87 B+; 86-84 B; 83-80 B-; 79-77 C+; 76-74 C; 73-70 C-; 69-67 D+; 66-64 D; 63-60 D-; 59 and below E

#### *Final Grades*

Final grades will be rounded up if above .5. (For example, an 89.6 is an A-; an 89.2 is a B+)

#### *UF Grading Policies*

For more information on current UF grading policies, refer to [UF Grades and Grading Policies](#).

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

**For all assignments you are asked to write a one-page (approximately 500 word) response to one or two given prompts. If there are two, you must address both prompts, but how you split up the page is up to you.**

The purpose of the assignments is to encourage you to think critically about internal communication and explore different avenues of internal communication that you may not have considered in the past.

All assignments are due on the specified dates. If you're going to submit something late, please inform me. Late assignments without explanation receive half credit, but late assignments where I am informed ahead of time are subject to a more informal resolution.

**Life happens, all you can do is proactively communicate, and put your best foot forward.**

Please submit assignments **with an effort towards grammar and paragraph flow**. This is not a writing class, but professional writing is integral to public relations and many related fields such as marketing, journalism, social media, strategic writing etc.

Keep in mind that technology can fail from time to time, so try to complete your assignments ahead of time. ***Sometimes due dates and details change. Please see Canvas for all up-to-date assignment details and due dates.***

## **AUGUST 26**

### **WEEK 1: Internal Communication**

#### **UPCOMING:**

#### **Assignment 1: Due September 2**

Read Chapter 1 from Excellence in Internal Communication Management.

1. Share your initial perceptions on internal communication. After reading Chapter 1, share how you can now understand that internal communication integrates management, human resources (HR), marketing, and, perhaps most importantly, internal public relations.
  - a. Briefly address how a few of these functions (HR, marketing, PR, management) are carried out through internal communication. You do not need to give examples for each one (though you may) if you prefer to go more in depth with a few.

## **SEPTEMBER 2**

### **WEEK 2: External Publics**

#### **UPCOMING:**

#### **Assignment 2: Due September 8**

Read Chapter 2 from Excellence in Internal Communication Management.

- When we think of stakeholders we might be tempted to think of solely external customers, but stakeholders encompass so many more groups. Similarly, when we think of employees, we may only think of white-collar office workers, but employees encompass everyone at the organization, though some groups are often ignored.
  - b. As you might imagine, a CEO communicating to an ESL hourly worker might be different than a manager in an office speaking to a direct report. **Reflect** on

some of these challenges and highlight a well-known organization where internal communication might be difficult or must be approached differently than the typical office environment.

- c. If you are looking for what to write about in this reflection, you can ask yourself some of the following questions (optional):
  - i. How does **space** (distance between the people communicating) play a role?
  - ii. How does **how** they communicate (in-person, over the phone, over a loudspeaker) play a role?
  - iii. How does **what** they communicate about play a role?

## **SEPTEMBER 9**

### **WEEK 3: Ethics**

#### **UPCOMING**

#### **Assignment 3: Due September 16**

Read Chapter 3 from Excellence in Internal Communication Management.

- Think about the concept of ethics versus profitability. Do you think it's possible for organizations that are profit-driven to truly prioritize ethics in the face of profit?
  - Optional prompts (to help you get started – optional)
  - What about organizations that are not solvent yet (like a startup)?
  - Can organizations that need profit also center ethics?
  - What about when profits might mean layoffs? There's no right answer here, just want you to think about it.
- Excellence theory is a big part of public relations academic research, historically. And, actually, a recent retired professor from University of Florida, Dr. Linda Childers Hon, was instrumental in this research and was advised by the founder of the theory, Dr. Grunig.
  - Reflect on Excellence Theory for internal publics– do you think it's perfect? Any critiques? What might you add? Is there anything you think is unrealistic?
    - i. If you need help, there's tons of journal articles on Excellence Theory, and feel free to quote some of their opinions and expand on them, as long as they are cited.

## **SEPTEMBER 16**

### **WEEK 4: Leadership Communication**

#### **UPCOMING:**

#### **Assignment 4: Due September 23**

Read Chapter 4 on Leadership Communication in Internal Communication Management. Then I will put a few journal articles on the assignment on Canvas and I would like you to choose **one** of them (try reading the abstracts and see what interests you) to read and reflect on.

- Explain your thoughts on how different channels and styles of leadership communication interact (you can talk about different levels or focus on one level like supervisor and direct report). How does technology make this more or less challenging?
- Give a brief summary of the article you chose (focus on what, why, and how) and then what was learned. How can this learning be taken out of academia and applied to a real business?

## **SEPTEMBER 23 – NO CLASS THIS WEEK, PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE**

### **WEEK 5: Reaching Internal Publics**

#### **UPCOMING:**

#### **Assignment 5: Due September 30**

Read Chapter 5 on Reaching Internal Publics

- Think about different types of internal stakeholders or employee groups that might be at an organization and consider which channels senior management might employ to best communicate with them.
  - Highlight 2-3 groups, create a situation, and walk through how you might best communicate with each group considering sender objectives, message attribution, channel, and receiver.

## **SEPTEMBER 30**

### **WEEK 6: Organizational Climate**

#### **UPCOMING:**

#### **Assignment 6: Due October 7**

Read Chapter 6 on Organizational Climate.

- Brainstorm about the socioeconomic contexts of organizations. You can either imagine what working at these organizations are like or pull from your own experience. Some ideas:
  - What's it like working at a small family-owned organization? What might be some of the pros and cons? What about a big organization with a large operating budget and many employees? Or how about a small startup with investors?
  - What about organizations that have a lot of regulation (like international products) versus organizations that still have a lot of regulatory grey area (marijuana or CBD)? You do not have to use these examples – the idea is to think about how different socioeconomic situations impact the internal communication climate.

## **OCTOBER 7**

### **WEEK 7: Employee Engagement**

## UPCOMING

### Assignment 7: Due October 14

Read Chapter 7 on Employee Engagement.

- Dive a little bit into employee engagement versus commitment versus satisfaction. The book gives a somewhat simple explanation, but can you explain scenarios where some of these psychological factors may exist but not others?
  - For example, (optional) how can commitment exist but not engagement? Or satisfaction without engagement? Can engagement exist without the other two?

## OCTOBER 14

### WEEK 8: Change Management

## UPCOMING

### Assignment 8: Due October 21

Read Chapter 8 on Change Management.

1. Imagine you are the CEO of a well-known company and write an email about a change to your internal stakeholders (employees). Utilize the “five magic questions” from the chapter and also consider Kotter’s 8 steps to implement change when writing the email.
  - a. Keep in mind that the email itself is a channel and the content should also reflect the organization and format of the change (i.e., be easy to read, probably have headings etc).

\*NOTE\*: There is only one prompt for this week, and if the prompt is fully addressed, less than 500 words is okay. Sometimes it’s better to be succinct!

## OCTOBER 21

### WEEK 9: Measuring Internal Communication and SMART Goals/KPI’s

## UPCOMING

### Assignment 9: Due October 28

Read Chapter 9 on Measuring Internal Communication as well as look at the attached/linked articles on KPI’s and SMART goals in Canvas.

1. Choose an internal communication goal based on what you’ve learned so far. You may also look at attached documents and case studies (in the examples folder) for inspiration. Compose a draft of a SMART goal for the situation.
2. For that same goal, try to write KPI’s – this might not be a perfect match but take a stab at it. For both of these you will be graded on effort and creative thinking, not perfection.

## OCTOBER 28

### WEEK 10: The Future of Internal Communication

**UPCOMING:**

**Assignment 10: Due November 4**

Read Chapter 10 on The Future of Internal Communication.

1. Choose two or three of the developments in the chapter that pertain to the future of internal communication and share your thoughts, concerns, or ideas on how these issues might take shape over time.
2. Share your opinion on if you think remote work or flexible workplaces are good for the future of internal communication or not? There's no right or wrong answer.

**NOVEMBER 4**

**WEEK 11: Case Studies**

This class we will be reviewing internal communication case studies and discussing them to provide a more holistic view on how internal communication can be implemented.

**NOVEMBER 11**

**WEEK 12: Internal Communication Plan Outline**

This week we will go over and do a few in-class activities regarding KPI's and SMART Goals to help prepare you for your Internal Communication Plan Outline.

**UPCOMING:**

**Internal Communication Plan Outline: Due November 18**

See Canvas for details.

**NOVEMBER 18 - NO CLASS PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE**

**WEEK 13:**

**NOVEMBER 25 – NO CLASS THANKSGIVING**

**WEEK 14:**

**DECEMBER 2**

**WEEK 15: Internal Communication Plan Presentation & Exam Review**

This week we will briefly present the Communication Plan Outline. We want these to be brief, succinct, and hear how you "logic" through your plan. These should be less than 5 minutes each.

We will also briefly go over the take-home exam study guide and exam procedure.

We will also have snacks.

## **EXAM**

There will be one closed-book exam. A study guide will be provided to you. Content of class discussions and required readings are subject to inclusion.

Note: the exam will be open book, and notes will be allowed.

**Please see Canvas for Exam due date and details.**

## **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION OUTLINE**

This is an expansion of the KPI and SMART goals we learned about earlier this semester. You will choose a company and create a detailed list of objectives, goals, and tactics based on an internal communication issue you want to address at that company. These will need to explain and flow into one another and, most importantly, the tactics and measurements must fit your objectives like a puzzle.

**Please see Canvas for Internal Communication Outline due date and details.**