

PUR3500: Public Relations Research

Summer A 2025

Instructor: Francis Akanbi

Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Description and Goals:

This course will provide you with an overview of the basic ways in which research is used in the public relations industry and the methods used to conduct that research. The goals for this course are to (1) help you understand the current methods of research used in public relations (e.g., focus groups, surveys, etc.) and (2) provide you with the tools necessary to put those methods into practice for clients of your choosing.

Because this is a **Summer A course**, the entire semester is condensed into just **six weeks**, which means everything will move at a fast pace. We'll be covering the same material that would typically span 15 weeks, so it's especially important to stay on top of readings, assignments, and other class activities. Also, since this class is **mostly asynchronous**, there's a natural tendency to fall behind or get distracted by other responsibilities. That's why I strongly encourage you to be proactive, organized, and make a conscious effort to stay engaged throughout the term. That said, please know I am here to support you in every way I can. Don't hesitate to reach out with questions, concerns, or anything you need to help you succeed in this course. Let's have a great and productive six weeks!

Required Text:

Stacks, D. W. (2016). *Primer of public relations research*, (3rd Ed.). New York: Guilford.

**Any supplemental readings will be made available to you on the course Canvas page.*

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this semester, students will:

- Have a basic understanding of the qualitative and quantitative research methods used in public relations
- Be able to compile background information on a company/client and organize it into a report
- Be able to conduct your own focus group as well as analyze, interpret, and organize your findings
- Be able to create and distribute a survey using Qualtrics
- Have a preliminary understanding of how to use SPSS for data analysis
- Be able to compile their research conducted over the course of the semester and present their findings

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:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the US
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world

Final Grade Breakdown:

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

Assignment:	Points (Percentage of Final Grade):
Exams	500 points
Final Research Project	305 points
○ Group Contract	20 points
○ Background Report	40 points
○ Focus Group Protocol	50 points
○ Focus Group Report	75 points
○ Survey Questions	45 points
○ Survey Report	75 points
Class Activities/Quizzes	50 points
IRB Training	25 points
SPSS Practice	20 points
Attendance	100 points
TOTAL	1000 points

Letter grades will be calculated as follows:

Letter	Course Points	Percentage	GPA Points
A	830-900	93-100%	4.0
A-	800-829	90-92.9%	3.67
B+	770-799	87-89.9%	3.33
B	730-769	83-86.9%	3.0
B-	700-729	80-82.9%	2.67
C+	670-699	77-79.9%	2.33
C	630-669	73-76.9%	2.0
C-	600-629	70-72.9%	1.67
D+	570-599	67-69.9%	1.33
D	500-569	60-66.9%	1.0
F	0-499	0-59.9%	0

Course Policies:

Attendance:

Since the course is mostly asynchronous, students are expected to complete all module activities in alignment with the timetable provided in the Tentative Schedule. This includes reading course materials, completing assignments, participating in group projects, taking exams, and engaging in any required discussion board activities. The course is approximately **75% asynchronous**, which means most of the learning will take place on your own time. You are responsible for keeping up with the course content, collaborating with your group members as needed, and meeting all deadlines. The remaining **25% of the course will be synchronous**, and we will meet via Zoom **three times over the six-week term**, for **two hours each session** on the following Mondays: 05/12, 05/26 and 06/09.

These **synchronous sessions are mandatory** and will carry **attendance points**. They provide a valuable opportunity to ask questions about course content, get clarification on assignments or projects, and receive additional instruction or feedback.

To receive full attendance credit for these sessions, **your screen must be on during the meeting**. If you are unable to turn your camera on, you must notify me **in advance** with the reason for your camera being off. Failure to attend or to meet the camera-on policy without prior communication may result in a loss of attendance points.

Late/Make-up Work:

All written assignments must be turned into Canvas by 11:59pm the day the assignment is due. Canvas will automatically mark assignments as late if they are uploaded even one second after 11:59pm. I understand that sometimes, we get caught up from happenings in our daily life and we fall into circumstances beyond our control that prevents us from meeting a deadline. Because of this, I will give a one-time grace of 24 hours after assignment is due to turn said assignment in (remember you can only use this grace once). If another occasion arises that you missed a deadline to submit an assignment, there will be a 10% grade reduction. It is your responsibility to make sure you properly upload a paper, blaming

a group member doesn't work as it is the group's joint responsibility. There are no make-ups/late exceptions for exams or in-class activities.

Course Conduct:

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 every of your course mates.

Overview of Course Components:

I will be as fair and impartial as possible during the grading process. Each of you will be graded on the same basis. Normally by the time I've returned your assignments, I've looked at everyone's work closely and feel comfortable with the grade assigned to it. Grades are earned; they are not gifts or negotiated and are awarded based on the quality of work not on the amount of time you spent working on an assignment. I will do my best to make this course enjoyable and interesting. However, some students struggle with the material. Please see me if you are having trouble understanding any of the concepts we cover in class. I am here to help you succeed and am available during office hours or by appointment if you are unable to make it during office hours. I will do everything I can to help you before a deadline but once that deadline passes or an exam has been given, there's nothing I can do to help you.

Exams:

There will be two exams over the course of the semester. The first exam will cover what we learn during the first half of the semester and the second exam will cover what we learn during the second half of the semester. Exams will be 250 points each, closed book, and administered online. They will cover content we go over during class lecture as well as the readings, including book chapters or supplements on Canvas. I will give you reading guides for the book chapters, which can serve as a study guide for your exams. There will be no make-up exams. Once the first person has finished their exam, no more exams can begin. **Please note:** Each exam will open on the scheduled date for a **24-hour period**, and you may begin the exam at any time within that window. However, **once you start the exam, you must complete it in that sitting**. The timer will begin immediately upon starting, and you must submit your answers within the **time allocated**. Before starting your exam, please make sure you have a **stable and reliable internet connection**. If your connection is interrupted during the exam, **you will not be given another opportunity to take it**, as there will be **no re-attempts or make-up exams** under any circumstances.

Research Project:

One of the goals of this class is to give you some hands-on experience of what it might look like to work in public relations. So, this semester, you will be divided into teams and have the opportunity to put together research on a client of your choosing. The individual components of your project are listed in the final grade breakdown section of the syllabus. We will discuss each component more in-depth when we meet synchronously. **Rubrics and detailed instructions for each assignment can be found on the course Canvas page.**

Class Activities:

Over the course of the semester, you will have course activities that make up 5% of your final grade. Please pay attention to these and get them in as at when due

IRB Training:

Not only is it important to learn the ins and outs of conducting research, but it is also important to make sure that research meets ethical standards. Prior to engaging in any research, you must complete UF's module on ethical research and upload a screenshot of your completed training certificate. Training can be found and completed by going to UF's Institutional Review Board [website](http://irb.ufl.edu/index/requiredtraining.html) (<http://irb.ufl.edu/index/requiredtraining.html>).

SPSS Training:

This semester, you'll be working with a data analysis program called SPSS. Before using it for your final project, it's important to understand how to use the program itself. You will be asked to download a data set from the course Canvas site and be able to access it through SPSS via [UF Apps](#). Specific directions for accessing the data set and opening it in UF Apps can be found on the course Canvas site.

Tentative Weekly Schedule*: 05/12/25 - 6/20/25

Week	Topic and Assignment Due Dates	Reading(s)**
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to course • Purpose of Research • Focus Group <p>Due: Info sheet 05/12 Group Contract 05/12 IRB 05/13</p> <p>*Synchronous Class 05/12 12-2pm</p>	Chap. 1, 2 & 11
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Qualitative Methods • Measurement <p>Due: Focus Group Protocol 05/19 Background Report 05/23</p>	Chap. 4, 5, 9 & 10
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Survey • Survey Design <p>Due: Focus Group Report 05/30 Exam 1 05/31</p> <p>*Synchronous Class 05/26 12-2pm</p>	Chap. 1, 2, 4 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sampling • Content Analysis <p>Due: SPSS Assignment 06/04 Survey Questions 06/8</p>	Chap. 8
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypothesis Testing • Descriptives <p>Due: SPSS Assignment 06/04 Survey Questions 06/08</p> <p>*Synchronous Class 06/09 12-2pm</p>	Chap. 15
6	<p>Due: Report 06/18 Final Exam 06/20</p>	

*Schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be sent out via e-mail/Canvas announcement.

University of Florida Policies and Campus Resources

Attendance and Absence Policy:

The University of Florida's attendance and absence policies can be found [here](#).

Grading Policy:

The University of Florida's grades and grading policies can be found [here](#).

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.

Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Click [here](#) for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. 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 ufl.bluer.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students [here](#).

University Honesty Policy:

The university's honesty policy regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc. Suggested wording: 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. Click [here](#) to read the Honor Code. 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 the instructor for this class.

Software Use:

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy:

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. More information can be found [here](#).

Health and Wellness Resources:

- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit the [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- **Counseling and Wellness Center (CWC):** Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center [website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- **Student Health Care Center:** Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need or visit the Student Health Care Center [website](#).
- **University Police Department:** Visit the UF Police Department [website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 911 for emergencies).
- **UF Health Shands Emergency Room/Trauma Center:** For immediate medical care, call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center [website](#).

Academic Resources:

- **E-Learning Technical Support:** Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- **Career Connections Center (CCC):** Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- **Library Support:** Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- **Teaching Center:** Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment call 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- **Writing Studio:** 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help with brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- **Student Complaints (On-Campus):** Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code [webpage](#) for more information.
- **Online Student Complaints:** View the Distance Learning Student [Complaint Process](#).