

Public Interest Communications

PUR 4442

Academic Term: Summer 2025

Instructor: Nader Dagher

Email: Please use Canvas mail. Expect a response within 24-48 business hours.

Phone Number: 352-709-2776

Office Hours: See the Zoom Conferences tab on the left for the Zoom meeting link.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course teaches you how to use strategic, science-based communications to effect positive social change. At the beginning of the semester, you will select a social issue on which to focus and an organization that is working to effect change related to that issue. Through activities and by analyzing your chosen organization's communications, you'll learn the basics of being a public interest communicator, including the science behind message framing, how to make people care about big issues, how to mobilize people to action, and how to select the best messengers to deliver your message. For your final project, you'll develop the key components of a strategic communications plan for a public interest campaign of your choosing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Define public interest communications and explain their role in bringing about positive social change.
- Explain the science behind key public interest communications concepts.
- Apply the concepts to real-world public interest communications campaigns and case studies.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of any public interest organization's communications.
- Craft the framework of a strategic public interest communications plan.
- Explore the many career opportunities in public interest.

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 where 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 and 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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Prerequisites

None

Textbook

Available as an eBook through the University of Florida library:

- Lakoff, G. (2014). *The all-new don't think of an elephant; know your values and fame the debate*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- The March for Our Lives Founders. (2018). *Glimmer of hope: How tragedy sparked a movement*. Penguin Random House.

Links to additional articles and videos will be provided in Canvas.

Course Technology Requirements

You will need reliable Internet access and a reliable computer with Microsoft Word (or other word processing software that can generate a .doc or .docx file), Adobe Flash (for viewing video content), and Adobe PDF reader.

GRADING POLICY

Writing Assignments

Format for writing assignments:

Please use the AP style for all writing assignments. If you don't have the AP Stylebook, you can subscribe to AP Stylebook Online (<https://store.stylebooks.com/apstylebookonline.html>) or purchase a hard copy.

Attribution in writing assignments:

In every assignment for this course, you must clearly attribute the source of your information, including information obtained from organizations' websites or internal documents. You cannot copy anything word for word, regardless of the source, without putting quotes around it and crediting the source.

Deadlines

Communications work is deadline oriented. Deadlines must be met. If they are not, you will not receive credit for the assignment. The only exceptions will be for students with medical emergencies (you must have a doctor's note) or other genuine, documented emergencies. Please notify your instructor as soon as possible if you have an emergency that will prevent you from completing an assignment.

Grading

Because communications at any public interest organization involve brainstorming and collaborating with colleagues, and because it's more fun to learn by seeking answers to questions through discussion rather than listening to a straight lecture, the discussion boards will be key to your learning and will be part of your grade. Likewise, the written analyses you do outside class will be critical because you will apply concepts covered in the course and the reading assignments.

For more information, please see the university's policy on grades and grading (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>).

Grading Distribution

Assignment	Points
Discussions and PlayPosit Video Assignments	30%
Writing Assignments and Quizzes	35%
Final Project	35%
Total	100%

Grading Scale

Percent	Grade	Grade Point
94-100	A	4.00
90-93	A-	3.67
87-89	B+	3.33
84-86	B	3.00
80-83	B-	2.67
77-79	C+	2.33
74-76	C	2.00
70-73	C-	1.67
67-69	D+	1.33

64-66	D	1.00
60-63	D-	0.67
0-59	E	0.00

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance Policy

As this is an online course, no classroom attendance is required. You will still need to allot sufficient time to complete this course's requirements. Please contact the Registrar's Office for information on withdrawal dates and procedures if necessary.

Class-Related Notifications

Please log in to Canvas daily to check for class-related announcements. You may set up alerts to forward messages directly to your UF email address. To adjust your notification settings in Canvas, follow these guidelines (<https://guides.instructure.com/m/4152/l/719738>).

Makeup Policy

Students who miss a discussion, quiz, exam, assignment, or project for a reason consistent with UF's excused absence policy will receive a reasonable amount of time to make up that assignment. Documentation will be required before assignments can be made up. Any missed items due to reasons not covered in UF's attendance policy will receive a score of 0. Assignments missed due to technical or computer problems will also receive a score of zero. **No other provisions will be provided for making up work.**

Academic Dishonesty

Academic Dishonesty will be dealt with strictly. Sharing/copying and "borrowing" work that is not your own original work are considered academic dishonesty. Code structure, discussing code structure, looking at code from another student or providing such code, and plagiarism, in addition to other dishonest behaviors, are all considered academic dishonesty. Students may share absolutely no information regarding assignment solutions except at a conceptual level. If students implement algorithms from other sources, they must cite those sources.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

University Policy on Accommodating Students With Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/> or 352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

University Policy on Academic Conduct

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

honesty 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 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specify a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. Please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class if you have any questions or concerns.

Plagiarism

The Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) state that:

"A Student must not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- Stealing, misquoting, insufficiently paraphrasing, or patch-writing.
- Self-plagiarism, which is the reuse of the student's own submitted work, or the simultaneous submission of the student's own work, without the full and clear acknowledgment and permission of the Faculty to whom it is submitted.
- Submitting materials from any source without proper attribution.
- Submitting a document, assignment, or material that, in whole or in part, is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment the student did not author."

Recording of Class

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.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving student participation solely, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same

class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Netiquette

All class members are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions, and chats. Failure to follow netiquette may result in a grade reduction. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Netiquette Guide for Online Courses (https://www.cise.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CISE_Netiquette_Guide.pdf).

GETTING HELP

Technical Difficulties

For help with technical issues or difficulties with Canvas, please contact the UF Computing Help Desk at:

- <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
- 352-392-HELP (4357)
- Walk-in: HUB 132

Any requests for make-ups (assignments, exams, etc.) due to technical issues should be accompanied by the ticket number received from the UF Computing Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You should email your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Health and Wellness

- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or someone you know is in distress, please email umatter@ufl.edu, call 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter We Care (<http://umatter.ufl.edu/>) to refer or report a concern, and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- **Counseling and Wellness Center:** Visit the UF Counseling & Wellness Center website (<http://counseling.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services and 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 UF Student Health Care Center (<http://shcc.ufl.edu/>) website.
- **Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, Assault, or Violence:** If you or a friend has been subjected to sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or violence contact the Office of Title IX Compliance (<https://titleix.ufl.edu/>), located at Yon Hall Room 427, 1908 Stadium Road, (352) 273-1094, title-ix@ufl.edu.
- **Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS):** Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

- **University Police Department:** Visit the UF Police Department (<http://police.ufl.edu/>) website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- **UF Health Shands Emergency Room/Trauma Center:** For immediate medical care in Gainesville, call 352-733-0111, or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Shands Emergency Room/Trauma Center (<https://ufhealth.org/uf-health-shands-emergency-room-trauma-center>) website.

Academic Resources

- **E-learning technical support,** 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.
- **Career Connections Center,** Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling; <https://career.ufl.edu>.
- **Library Support,** <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- **Teaching Center,** Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.
- **Writing Studio,** 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.
- **Student Complaints Campus:** <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>; <https://care.dso.ufl.edu>.
- **On-Line Students Complaints:** <https://distance.ufl.edu/state-authorization-status/#student-complaint>.

TIPS FOR TAKING AN ONLINE COURSE

Here are some tips that will help you get the most out of this course while taking full advantage of the online format:

- Schedule "class times" for yourself. It is important to do the coursework on time each week.
- Read ALL of the material contained on this site. There is a lot of helpful information that can save you time and help you meet the objectives of the course.
- Print out the Course Schedule located in the Course Syllabus and check things off as you go.
- Take full advantage of the online discussion boards. Ask for help or clarification of the material if you need it.
- Do not wait to ask questions! Waiting to ask a question might cause you to miss a due date.
- Do your work well before the due dates. Sometimes things happen. If your computer goes down when you are trying to submit an assignment, you'll need time to get to another machine.
- To be extra safe, back up your work to an external hard drive, thumb drive, or through a cloud service.

Online learning can present significant challenges, particularly if you are not a "self-starter" or do not possess good time management skills. The online classroom is available to you 24 hours per day. Unlike traditional instructional settings in which each student gets the same class, the online setting means that every student works when they want to work. In theory, this type of instruction should be more adaptable to various schedules and learning styles. However, some students seem unwilling (we believe all are able) to create their own virtual classroom. This results in procrastination and low-quality performance. Everyone learns differently. We won't prescribe the "best way" to approach the course.

You should note that this course is self-paced; however, you are expected to adhere to the weekly due dates. And deadlines **DO CHANGE** because of holiday breaks, technical difficulties, hurricanes, and other inclement weather, etc., so...**PAY ATTENTION TO ANNOUNCEMENTS** and email messages posted by your facilitator. Stating "I didn't know" is an **unacceptable** excuse for this self-directed course.

Individual attention to each student's particular needs and monitoring each student's progress is often difficult **unless you make me aware of a special problem**. If you are unclear about the material in lectures and/or readings, have other questions, or need assistance, please contact us as soon as possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Information
1	<p>Welcome!</p> <p>Welcome! This week, we'll introduce public interest communications, an emerging academic field that is becoming increasingly important as the challenges we face as a society grow. What is public interest communications? What careers can you have as a public interest communicator? How does one determine what's in the public interest? You'll explore the answers to these questions through reading, discussions, an easy quiz, and a video presentation.</p> <p>Communications for Social Change – A Look-Back</p> <p>This week, we will look at how communication has been used for positive social change throughout history. We're going to look at the arc of social movements and be inspired by successful campaigns that have done so much good in just a short time.</p>

2	<p>The Six Spheres Framework</p> <p>This week, we'll introduce a key framework you can use as a public interest communicator to approach challenges creatively. This framework outlines the levers we can use to move people to action.</p> <p>The Four Questions</p> <p>This week, we introduce another important framework – the four-question, back-of-the-envelope guide to developing a communications strategy – and dive into the first question.</p>
3	<p>Messengers</p> <p>This week, we continue with the second question from our back-of-the-envelope framework. Once we identify who we need to mobilize to make our goal a reality, we must think about who best conveys the message to those actors. In other words, we must figure out who is the best messenger. The answer might surprise you.</p> <p>How Do You Craft Messages That Move People? The Science Behind Message Framing</p> <p>We move on to the third question in the four-question framework: What would your actors believe if they were to help achieve the campaign goal? This week, we explore the importance of understanding the worldviews of the people you speak to and basing your messages on shared values.</p>
4	<p>Campaign Project</p> <p>This week, we'll go through the steps you need to take to identify a campaign for your final project and conduct research on it.</p> <p>How Do You Make People Care About Big Issues?</p> <p>Research shows that the larger a problem is and the more people it affects, the more likely people are to tune out. This week, we'll explore the science that explains this phenomenon and what</p>

	communicators can do to make people care about big problems. Plus, we'll delve into the science behind storytelling.
5	<p>The Science of Emotions and Painting a Picture With Words</p> <p>This week, we'll talk about the science behind emotions and why evoking emotions is more effective than citing facts when trying to engage people and motivate them to act. We'll also discuss how to paint pictures with words and use rhetorical devices to craft powerful messages.</p> <p>Digital Media</p> <p>Just as some people are best reached via newspapers, radio, or TV news, others get their news from social media. This week, we look at how digital media is key to helping public interest communicators get their messages out, and we'll look at the differences between popular social media platforms.</p>
6	<p>Measuring Success</p> <p>While many public interest communicators might want to just move on to the next project when they've finished a campaign, it's important to look back and assess how well your plan worked. What went well? What could have gone better? Knowing these answers will help inform your plans for future campaigns. This week, we're going to look at how to evaluate your strategic communications plan.</p> <p>Final Project Work</p> <p>At the beginning of the semester, you selected an issue and organization on which to focus. You have analyzed what the organization has done; it's your turn now to create a campaign you want to run. For this final assignment, you'll craft key pieces of a strategic communications plan related to your issue.</p>

DISCLAIMER

This syllabus represents the instructor's current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.