

**PUR4203: Ethics and Professional Responsibility in Public Relations
Fall 2025**

Tuesday, 10:40 a.m.-12:35 p.m. & Thursday, 11:45 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.

Instructor: Jeannie Clary

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Credits: 3

Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom. I am happy to schedule time to meet via Zoom during any weekday based on mutual availability.

Zoom Link: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/97940939492?pwd=n4XhMoGI9u30Bn0Au7eZsFoogza9KV.1>

COURSE OVERVIEW

Ethics & Professional Responsibility in Public Relations provides an understanding of the role of ethics in public relations, both in historical and current perspective. The growing lack of trust in institutions has moved ethical considerations of public relations to center stage. Now more than ever, we must understand the possibilities and responsibilities for professional communicators. Discussing real life scenarios, we will explore the history of ethics and PR, ethical dilemmas for communicators, the business relevance of ethics, ethics and leadership, and the interesting evolving dynamic between ethics and technology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To enhance your awareness of the ethical responsibilities of public relations professionals and of the social responsibilities of corporations and other organizations;
- 2) To increase your ability to identify the moral dimensions of issues that arise in the practice of public relations;
- 3) To enhance your ability to employ reason as a tool for dealing with moral issues;
- 4) To provide you the knowledge and skills necessary to reach and justify ethical decisions;
- 5) To elicit within you a sense of personal and professional responsibility; and 6) to teach you leadership theories and principles to enhance ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This class requires your full engagement. You must keep up with the assignments and complete all activities in a timely manner. Not all of the materials that you read will be discussed or explained in the lectures, and conversely, not everything discussed in our lectures will be written in the textbook. If you need further explanations or clarification on anything, please reach out to me. You should come to class each week prepared to justify/defend your own perspectives about ethics situations. ***While it is important that you absorb and process the provided material, learn about background and history, models and frameworks, etc., I am primarily interested in your perspective of what you are hearing and learning.*** Put it in context with your own experience, and in discussions, express your own thoughts, make your own voice heard (rather than just repeat the learned material).

NOTE: While this class is fully online, it is NOT asynchronous. Attendance is required per the attendance policy discussed below.

Expectations include the following:

- Read the assigned materials before the class meeting
- Come prepared to discuss readings and PR situations in the news
- Submit real-life PR/communications ethics examples you find
- Submit reaction papers based on the readings *where assigned*
- Share your reactions to the readings and/or relevant issues in the news in our class discussions
- Case Study:
 - Research a case study approved by the instructor
 - Give a short *oral* report summarizing the case and the public relations strategies used by the organization
 - Submit a final report that discusses the case, describes the public relations strategies used in the case and recommends an ethics communication program

As most students in this class are only a short time from graduating, I believe it's important to prepare for the non-academic world of PR. As such, we will approach this course as we would approach client work in a PR agency. We will view case studies from the practitioner-to-client perspective. ***All work should be written in AP Style, with clear, grammatically correct sentences and PR formatting:***

- Single-spaced (except between each paragraph)
- Professional font, e.g., Times New Roman, Garamond, Arial, Calibri, etc.
- No paragraph indentations

COURSE PROFESSIONALISM

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Carefully consider how you participate and the assignments you submit. Use your best professional judgment. I expect students to arrive on time via Zoom, not leave early, and wait for the class to end before signing off.

Discussion Demeanor: I want this class to be fun and energetic with great discussions, and we will cover sensitive topics and ones about which some students may have strong feelings. Therefore, I expect you to be courteous and respectful to your fellow classmates. Please be polite to others while both expressing opinions and responding to them. *Any form of disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.*

Zoom Screens: This class requires discussion and holding conversations with a grid of blank screens is difficult at best. As such, you must leave your screen on for the duration of class unless you have cleared it with me for that day.

COURSE CONTENT

Course content not already listed will usually be published 1-2 weeks in advance. We will occasionally have guest speakers. As such, the dates and corresponding work – such as discussions and assignments – on the syllabus might change. I will give you plenty of notice so you can adjust as needed, as we firm up guest speakers' schedules.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Introduction (5%)

Write an introduction, telling me who you are, where you're from, your major, what you plan to do in PR and what you hope to learn in this class. In bullet points, please list any questions you have about PR and PR/communications careers – this could be anything, from questions about how agencies work, negotiating salaries, work life balance, being a working parent, etc.

Reaction Papers (15%)

Students are expected to submit 4 two-to-three page reaction papers. Reaction papers are due by the beginning of class on the assigned date.

- The first page of the paper must *summarize or outline the main points of the week's readings* and the second page should be *your personal reaction to or interpretation of the readings*.

- All papers must be submitted via Canvas by the deadline on the due date. Late papers will not be accepted, unless I was made aware and gave an extension BEFORE the deadline.
- **Reaction papers will be graded along the following lines:**
 - **Inadequate:** No submission OR inaccurate summary of readings and no context or analysis
 - **Minimally Adequate:** Summarizes the readings accurately but does not offer analysis.
 - **Average:** Offers an accurate summary of the readings and will respond thoughtfully to the issues raised.
 - **Good:** Summarizes but also integrates the readings with what you have learned *previously* about public relations in *other* classes.
 - **Excellent:** Summarizes, integrates the readings and brings in previously gleaned information *and* *new* information from what you're learning about public relations and ethics in *this* course.
 - **Next-Level:** Goes beyond summary, reaction and integration to develop a new idea beyond what you are learning in class. Next-level papers will be rare.

Case Study Final Report (30%)

Each student will select a case study after consultation with Professor Clary. You will research this case and the public relations implications. Case studies may be selected from a variety of sources, such as "Public Relations Ethics: How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul" by Dick Martin & Donald K. Wright, [The Arthur W. Page Center](#), PRSA's archive of ethics case studies, [Media Ethics Initiative](#), Institute for Public Relations, etc. You are welcome to find case studies from any reputable source as long as you get it approved by Professor Clary.

- **Final Report:** Your final report will a) summarize the case and b) provide your recommendations for a successful, ethical PR program. You should describe your program and the process the company should have used to develop the program. Program elements should include recommendations for:
 - Formative research
 - Planning and design steps
 - Implementation and execution phases
 - Evaluation

Discussion Leadership (20%)

Each week, two or three students will be assigned to take a class leadership role for the online discussion (via Canvas) of the readings and the lecture. You have complete freedom in how you elect to approach that leadership role. Here are some ways to approach this:

- Summarize own reaction paper (or share it in its entirety) and then direct discussion around paper.
- Prepare questions to generate thought-provoking discussions
- Lecture on the topic and bring additional readings or other materials to the lecture
- Take a critical position on the authors' perspectives and bring evidence as to why you think an author is wrong
- Show the class current event examples that illustrate the week's readings.
- Use Kahoots quizzes, games, video/multimedia, pop culture examples to engage discussion

These are just examples. There's no one "right" way to lead; you will be evaluated in terms of content, how creative you were and how much impact your leadership had on the breadth and depth of the class discussion.

Attendance (15%)

Class attendance is expected. There are three non-penalized absences. If you are ill or have a conflict and can't make it to class, please let me know *beforehand* via text or email. Also, being habitually late to class will impact your attendance. Five minutes will be considered "late." Punctuality is particularly important in an online class so we can begin on time.

- **Religious Observances:** If one of our class dates falls on the date of religious holiday you observe, please let me know in advance. You will be excused and it will not count against your absences. As you can turn them in virtually, assignments will still be due by the deadline. If there is a multi-day

observance that conflicts with turning the assignment in, please let me know ahead of time. I will only accept late assignments if you have discussed it with me ahead of time.

- **Zoom Screens:** This class requires discussion and holding conversations with a grid of blank screens is difficult at best. As such, you must leave your screen on for the duration of class unless you have cleared it with me for that day. You will be marked absent if your screen is off for the entire class unless you clear it with Professor Clary beforehand. Students who leave their screens off for any significant portion of the class without being excused will lose points from their participation grade.

In-Class Participation (15%)

You will participate in the weekly discussions in both small group assignments and with the entire class. In addition to taking a leadership role in your assigned week, you will be graded on how thoughtfully and respectfully you take part in class discussions. I will be making this summary judgment--not on how often you talk--but on the quality of that contribution.

- As part of your participation grade, you must conduct news and social media searches and look for any items that might involve ethical considerations for an organization or government. Send to Professor Clary by 10:30 a.m. each Tuesday or Thursday and we will add the item to our class discussion, time permitting. You might not have something to send every week, so you won't be graded weekly. However, this will be taken into consideration as part of your overall class participation score. Because these examples are meant to aid in class discussion, you should have **at least five (5) submissions for the semester, with at least one submission in August, September, October and November.** In other words, you will not receive full credit for submitting all five examples at the end of the course.
- It is important to be present and engaged in the class. I expect students to participate in our classes. However, I understand that some people are not fully comfortable with speaking up in class, particularly on Zoom. As such, there are several ways to receive full credit for class participation:
 - Participate in & make meaningful contributions to class discussions by speaking up or asking questions/adding comments via the Zoom chat.
 - Send relevant or interesting examples of current real-world PR ethics situations you see in the news or on social media. (HINT: Relevant examples could include pieces when a company receives criticism, handles a difficult situation well, has an influencer partnership that's a horrible fit, has an influencer partnership that's a great fit, the CDC makes an announcement, UF makes an announcement, and so much more. PR ethics comes into play in so many situations.)
 - Email Professor Clary with suggested relevant topics for class discussion.
 - Other opportunities that might arise during the semester.

If you truly do not feel you will be able to speak up via Zoom, please let me know via email during the first week of class so I know. We can come up with an alternate option.

POLICY ON GENERATIVE AI

Generative AI can be a useful tool in the PR profession and is currently permitted in some classes in this department. However, in PR Ethics & Professional Responsibility, I want you to produce your own work **without generative AI's assistance**. Given the nature of this course – **ethics and professional responsibility** – it is important for me to be able to ascertain what you know and can produce unaided on your own. **More importantly for the long-term benefit of your careers, PR professionals MUST be outstanding, dynamic writers. As such, the use of generative AI for your assignments in this class would be a violation of the honor code** as you are presenting content as your own that was not fully created by you. There are various AI detection tools available (built within Canvas and externally such as ZeroGPT), and many AI platforms follow very formulaic response patterns. If I am concerned that your work is not your own, I will try to verify the originality of your work. If evidence is found that your work is AI-generated, I will submit your assignment as violating the honor code.

DEADLINES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Public relations professionals are often bound by tight, important deadlines, whether for media, clients or colleagues. Missing these can damage our credibility, as well as our clients' credibility. Media deadlines are almost always immovable. Even if there's a true emergency, missing a media deadline will typically result in losing the placement. Client deadlines are similar, but sometimes with slightly more flexibility, depending on the client, project, issue and how you approach it. Internal deadlines (those within your team or agency) are often more flexible, but not by much. Even internally, deadlines are set so that other people will be able to do their parts of the project. For example, if you're tasked with delivering a media brief to your supervisor by a certain time, your deadline is set so that your supervisor will have time to review, edit and send to the client so the client has time to review, approve and prepare for their media interview.

Therefore, I take a similar approach to class assignments. **"Late" is considered anything submitted after the deadline on the due date, unless otherwise noted.**

If for any reason, you think you will miss a deadline, even by 30 minutes, please discuss it with me in advance. This is not only out of respect, but practice for work in the PR field. If you think your assignment will be late, even by 30 minutes, please reach out and explain why. I assess late assignments on a case-by-case basis. Under legitimate extenuating circumstances, I will agree to let you schedule a makeup or turn in an assignment late. **Late assignments turned in without explanation will receive a zero.** Lost files are not an acceptable excuse for late or missing work. Remember Murphy's Law. Please back up all your files; you may choose to do so on a USB flash drive, Google Drive, iCloud, Dropbox, etc.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLIENT EXAMPLES: To help you in your assignments, I will share examples of real-life client work, such as strategic plans, news releases, pitches, etc. This is proprietary information belonging to me. While I am always happy to share these examples with my students, they may not be shared outside of this class at any point during or after the semester.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This is an online course, and we will meet via e-learning in Canvas/Zoom. A learning module will be set up for each online section containing a lecture, readings and activities/assignments for the week. You will be required to read the assigned chapters/pages, go through the lecture slides and do each week's assigned work. It is your responsibility to follow and adhere to the schedule. We will use Canvas <http://elearning.ufl.edu/> for the course communication, materials and grades.

Availability

Please feel free to speak with me during the semester about any questions or concerns you have. You can also reach me by email and I'll do my best to get back to you within 24 hours. If it's urgent, you may text me, but please don't text after 8 p.m.

Grading Scale

The grading scale for the course follows current UF policies (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

- A 94-100
- A- 90-93
- B+ 87-89
- B 84-87
- B- 80-83
- C+ 77-79
- C 74-76
- C- 70-74
- D+ 67-69
- D 64-66
- D- 61-63
- E < 63

Required Reading

- “Public Relations Ethics: How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul” by Dick Martin & Donald K. Wright
- Links as assigned by Professor Clary

Useful Web Sites

[PRWeek](#)

[PRovoke](#)

[IPR Research Letter](#)

[PRNEWS](#)

- Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship: <http://www.bccccc.net/>
- Business Ethics: The Magazine of Corporate Responsibility: <http://www.business-ethics.com/>
- Business for Social Responsibility: <http://www.bsr.org/index.cfm>
- Compliance Week:
<http://www.complianceweek.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Article.AdvancedSearchResults>
- CSRwire: CSR news and press releases: <http://www.csrwire.com>
- Ethical Corporation Online: <http://www.ethicalcorp.com>
- Global Reporting Initiative: <http://www.globalreporting.org/Home>
- The Institute of Social and Ethical Accountability: <http://www.accountability21.net/default.aspx?id=54>
- World Bank--Business Ethics and Corporate Accountability: The Search for Standards:
http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/corpgov/csr/pdf/bizethics_econference.pdf
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development: <http://www.wbcsd.org/>

UNIVERSITY POLICIES & RESOURCES

Please visit the following link for information on UF academic policies, as well as academic, campus and health resources: <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>

Please let Professor Clary know if you have any questions.

CLASS CALENDAR

Please note dates, topics and readings might change as we add guest speakers and readings may be added, but any deadlines or discussion weeks will be pushed back rather than ahead.

Week	Date	In-Class Discussion	Discussion Leaders	Assignments
1	Thursday 8/21	Introduction & Class Overview	Professor Clary	<p>Introduction: Write an introduction, telling me who you are, where you're from, your major, what you're hoping to do in PR, what you're hoping to learn in this class. Please include the phonetic spelling of your first and last names. In bullet points, please list any questions you have about PR and PR/communications careers – this could be anything, from questions about how agencies work, negotiating salaries, work life balance, etc. DEADLINE: 08/28/24</p> <p>Weekly News Search: Conduct news search for any news items that might involve ethical considerations for an organization or government. Send to Professor Clary via Canvas by 10:30 a.m. each Tuesday, and we will add the item to our Thursday class discussion, time permitting. DEADLINE: 10:30 a.m. each Tuesday & Thursday IF you have any submissions. It's OK to not submit something every week, but submissions should be frequent.</p>

2	8/26-8/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding Ethics for Communications Professional Codes of Ethics Ethics vs. Morality Weekly News Items 	Professor Clary	<p>ASSIGNMENTS:</p> <p>Read and React #1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Read "PR Ethics: How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul," Chapter 2 -- "Is PR Inherently Unethical?" & the blog post "Ethical Dilemmas: Knowing Where Your Loyalties Lie," from PRSA. Write reaction paper giving your thoughts. DEADLINE: 9/2 <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> in "Public Relations Ethics: How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul" "The Revolution of Ethics in Public Relations" by Shannon Bowen, Institute for Public Relations Review "IPRA Code of Athens—The first international code of public relations ethics" and the PRSA Code of Ethics and the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management Code of Ethics. Keep a printout or screenshot with you for our class as these will be important to your participation and understanding. <p>Have read by 08/26. No reaction paper due.</p> <p>Weekly News Search: Conduct news search for any news items that might involve ethical considerations for an organization or government. Send to Professor Clary via Canvas by 10:30 a.m. each Tuesday, and we will add the item to our Thursday class discussion, time permitting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEADLINE: 10:30 a.m. each Tuesday & Thursday IF you have any submissions. It's OK to not submit something every week, but submissions should be frequent.
3	9/2-9/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is PR Inherently Unethical? Social Responsibility & Ethics News items sent from weekly news search 	Professor Clary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "PR Ethics: How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul," Chapter 2 -- "Is PR Inherently Unethical?" PRSA blog post "Ethical Dilemmas: Knowing Where Your Loyalties Lie," "How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul," Chapter 3 "Virtue & Character" and Chapter 4, "Public Relations of Character." Weekly News Search
4	9/9-9/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical Decision-Making & Reasoning <p>- CLASS DISCUSSION LEADERS BEGIN -</p>	Professor Clary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> READ "How to Practice PR W/o Losing Your Soul: Chapter 6 (Respect for Reasoning), Chapter 11 (Ethical Decision-Making) & Chapter 12 (Frameworks for Ethical Reasoning) Read PRSA: Ethical Decision-Making Guide Helps Resolve Ethical Dilemmas

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly News Search
5	9/16-9/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Moral Development of PR Practitioners 		1. READ AND REACT #2: Read the following three articles and write a reaction paper: The Moral Development of Public Relations Practitioners, Silent & unprepared: Most millennial practitioners have not embraced role as ethical conscience . Public Relations Review, 43, 337 – 344, Summary: Baylor University: "Millennials in PR feel unprepared to offer companies advice on moral dilemmas at work" DEADLINE: 9/16 2. Weekly News Search
6	9/23-9/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Social Responsibility & Transparency Communications Ethics in a Global Context 		1. READ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter 7, "The Public Interest" and Chapter 8, "Corporate Responsibility, <i>How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul</i> "CSR is dead & millennials killed it" (see article attachment in Canvas module) Why Traditional CSR Is Not Enough (see article attachment in Canvas module) Brands in Motion: A Turning Point for Ethics and Tech?, Institute for Public Relations, Kass Sells Global Case Study: Mercedes Benz in China (see Class Week 6 module for attachment) 2. Weekly News Search
7	9/30-10/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Relations and Speech Libel, Defamation & Slander 		READ AND REACT #3: Read the following and write a reaction paper. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-read "How to Practice PR" Ch. 4 USA Today: What the First Amendment Protects – and What It Doesn't Chronicle of Higher Education: Nine Lessons Learned After Richard Spencer's Florida Speech Vox: The Limits of Free Speech Libel, Slander & Defamation: What's the Difference & Why Should PR Pros Care? Chron.com: What Laws Affect Public Relations? DEADLINE: 9/30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly News Search <p>DUE DATE: Submission of 3 ranked case study options for your final report are due to Professor Clary today.</p>
8	10/7-10/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media Framing & Ethics 	Professor Clary	READINGS TBD

9	10/14-10/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Relations and Harm PR and Protecting Creative Property 		<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul: Re-read Chapter 4 Chron.com: Ethical & Legal Considerations in Public Relations PRSA: Ethics, Copyright & PR Practice – Ethical & Legal Considerations for Communicators NOLO.com: Fair Use – When Copyrighted Material Can Be Used Without Permission PR News: What PR Pros Should Know About Protecting Intellectual Property (Pt. 1) PR News: Ways PR Pros Can Avoid Disaster When Using Intellectual Property (Pt. 2) ShiftComm: Copyright 101 – Basics of Avoiding Content Marketing Lawsuits Bloomberg Law: Legal Implications of Generative AI
10	10/21-10/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics in Crisis Management 		<p>READ AND REACT #4: Read the following and write a reaction paper DEADLINE: 10/21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authenticity and Ethics: Implications for Internal Crisis Management, Institute for Public Relations, Hongmei Shen, Ph.D. The Worst Words You Can Say When You're Trying to Apologize, Newsweek Why Are Brands So Bad at Apologizing?, Vox Approaches to Ethics for Crisis Management (see: Class Week 11 module for attachment) Care in Crisis: An Applied Model of Care Considerations for Ethical Strategic Communication by Julia Daisy Fraustino, Amanda K. Kennedy (see Canvas module for attachment) Successful Crisis Outcome Checklist (See: Class Week 11 module for attachment) <p>Weekly News Search</p>
11	10/28-10/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics & Social Media 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "PRSA's Ethics & Social Media" "Ensuring the Ethical Use of Social Media in PR" Michelle Ewing, <i>Strategies & Tactics</i>, September 2021. Business News Daily: How to Avoid Copyright Infringement in the Age of Social Media Social media ethics in the data economy: Issues of social responsibility for using Facebook for public relations, Candace L. White *, Brandon Boatwright, <i>Public Relations Review</i> 2020 (see Week 9 module for file) Observer: 13 Social Media Mistakes Your Business is Making Could Land You in Legal Trouble "One Does Not Simply Create a Meme," Scott R. Stroud, <i>Media Ethics Initiative</i>, Jan 14, 2019

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ever-Evolving Ethics of Social Media (Links to an external site.), Nance Larsen, <i>Public Relations Tactics</i>, September 2015 • What's In Your Social Media Policy? (Links to an external site.), Charlotte J. Smith, <i>Strategies & Tactics</i>, June-July 2021
12	11/4-11/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics & Digital Media 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRSA: Ethical Use of AI for Public Relations Practitioners (official industry guidance) • Forbes: Ethics in Digital Marketing: What to Know and How to Align • University of Wisconsin: Digital Media Ethics by Stephen A. Ward • EXAMPLE: Lush Cosmetics – great digital ethics statement <p>Weekly News Search</p>
13	11/11-11/13	Ethics & AI		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Ethics Guide for Artificial Intelligence in PR, Institute for Public Relations, Jean Valin and Anne Gregory • PRSA: Employee Communicators at “Crossroads” Over AI • PRSA: 4 Steps to Take to Ensure Accuracy in AI Content • PR Week: AI-Powered PR: Navigating the ethical landscape (see Class Week 14 module) <p>Weekly News Search</p>
14	11/18-11/20	PROFESSIONAL ADVICE DAY FINAL REPORT QUESTIONS		
NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK				
	12/3	LAST CLASS FINAL REPORT DUE BY 11:59 PM		