

Fall 2025 SYLLABUS: Corporate Communication Essentials (⚙️) PUR 4204 (22005)

University of Florida – Department of Public Relations

Professor: Patrick Ford, Professional-in-Residence

Teaching Assistant: Sarah Abisror

Quick Reference Guide

Item	Details
Class Meetings	Tue 10:40 – 12:35; Thur 10:40 – 11:30 Zoom (live/synchronous)
Office Hours	Tue 1–2 p.m. Wed 3–4 p.m. (Appointments recommended; available outside hours by request)
Contact Info	Prof: fordp@ufl.edu 703-966-8138 Canvas messages TA: sarah.abisror@ufl.edu
Note	This syllabus is subject to change at the professor's discretion.

Required Readings

Title	Author	Edition/Year	ISBN	Notes
<i>Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer</i>	Matthew W. Ragas and Ron Culp	1st ed. (2021)	9781838696629	Paperback

Additional readings will be provided on Canvas. Read assigned materials before the listed class.

Major Deadlines

Date	Assignment
Nov 6	Preliminary Draft of Group Project Due
Nov 13	Final Group Project & Presentations Begin
Dec 2	Course Wrap-up

Welcome from Professor Ford

In today's data-driven business landscape, communicators are expected not only to craft messages -- but they are also expected to contribute to management decisions. This course gives you the tools to speak the language of the C-suite, interpret financial reports, analyze stakeholder relationships, and connect communication strategies to organizational goals. Through real-world case studies and insights from senior executives, you'll learn how business acumen elevates your credibility, sharpens your strategy, and prepares you to lead in any corporate, nonprofit, or agency setting.

Course Description

Effective strategic communicators do more than craft messages -- they understand the business realities that drive organizational decisions. This course explores why communication professionals in every sector -- corporate or nonprofit, in-house or agency, creative or management -- must possess a strong foundation in business acumen.

Students will examine how organizations generate revenue and measure performance, from reading a balance sheet to understanding the significance of financial reports. They will explore how companies report results and disclose material information under varying regulations for public, private, and nonprofit entities. The course will address how corporations engage stakeholders -- employees, customers, suppliers, investors, communities -- and why reputation, purpose, mission, and values matter for long-term success.

We will also study the relationships between senior communication leaders and the C-suite, the role of boards of directors, and the importance of global business awareness. Real-world corporate examples and guest lectures from senior communication executives will provide insight into how leading organizations engage stakeholders such as governments, media, investors, social media influencers, and other opinion leaders. By semester's end, students will understand how business insight strengthens communication strategy and positions them as trusted advisors.

Course Objectives

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

1. **Build Core Business Acumen** – Demonstrate a foundational understanding of how organizations create value and how business knowledge strengthens strategic communication.

2. **Apply Stakeholder Theory** – Identify key stakeholders and analyze how stakeholder expectations, purpose-driven commitments, and internal/external engagement strategies shape corporate reputation and business outcomes.
3. **Understand the Evolving Role of Corporations** – Explain how societal expectations, corporate purpose, and public relations strategies intersect in the modern business environment.
4. **Interpret and Communicate Financial Information** – Read basic financial statements, understand material information, and explain financial disclosure requirements for public, private, and nonprofit organizations.
5. **Recognize C-Suite and Board Dynamics** – Understand the roles of senior executives and boards of directors, and how communication leaders collaborate with them to guide strategy.

Assignments & Grading

Component	% of Grade	Description
Attendance	10%	Be present, on time, and engaged
Participation	40%	Prepare for discussions, engage actively, occasional pop quizzes
Group Project	50%	Collaborate on in-depth case study

Academic Policies and Resources

Please see this link to important policies and resources:

<https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>

Weekly Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Topic / Reading	Notes
1	Aug 21	Welcome and course overview	
2	Aug 26-28	Why and how strategic communicators should build business acumen	Read foreword by Linda Rutherford and essay by Joe Cohen on p.112

3	Sept 2-4	Understanding the language of business “Growth, Innovation and Transformation”	Review the glossary in textbook (pp. 213-255) Read Ch. 2 in Textbook
4	Sept 9-11	“Stakeholders and Society” Case Study Workshop	Read Ch. 5 in Textbook
5	Sept 16-18	“The Purpose-Driven Enterprise”	Read Ch. 4 in Textbook
6	Sept 23-25	“Corporate Governance: Board of Directors and the C-Suite”	Read Ch. 6 in Textbook
7	Sept 30 – Oct 2	“Finance and the Capital Markets”	Read Ch. 7 in Textbook
8	Oct 7-9	Financial Statements and Valuation Essentials”	Read Ch. 8 in Textbook
9	Oct 14-16	Corporate Disclosure Laws	Read Ch. 9 in Textbook
10	Oct 21-23	Deep Dive on Quarterly Earnings, including Workshop on Earnings Calls	
11	Oct 28-30	“Blending Investor Relations, Corporate Communications, and Brand Strategy for Maximum Impact.”	
12	Nov 4-6	International Business Acumen for Communicators	Preliminary Group Project Drafts Due Nov 6
13-14	Nov 13 Nov 18-20	Group Projects Due Presentations	Final Group Projects Due Nov. 13
14	Nov 25-27	Thanksgiving Break – No Classes	
15	Dec 2	Course Wrap-up	

Appendix

Compliance with ACEJMC Accreditation Standards

Note: This course aligns with Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) accreditation standards and emphasizes competencies in ethical decision-making, culturally proficient communication, stakeholder engagement, and digital literacy.

The ACEJMC 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

Prerequisite:

- PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations

Additional Grading Details

Attendance 10%

- Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences during the semester may cause a

reduction in credit for attendance and participation. If you need to be excused, you are responsible for notifying the instructor prior to missing class or as soon as possible afterwards in an emergency. Requirements for assignments and other work in this course follow UF policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Active Participation Points: 40%

- Active class participation will be assessed and graded on an ongoing basis. To receive high scores, you must demonstrate active engagement, which includes arriving in class on time, keeping your camera on during Zoom sessions, and being prepared to make comments, ask questions, or answer questions as appropriate. We will also have occasional pop quizzes to gauge your understanding of course content and guest-lecture discussions. Each month, you will receive feedback and a point allocation for your participation:
 - Excellent: fully prepared for and performing strongly in discussions and pop quizzes
 - Satisfactory: present and actively listening; but minimal engagement and/or poor pop quiz results
 - Needs improvement; failure to be present and engaged.

Group Project: Case Study 50%

This semester-long team project gives you the opportunity to apply business acumen to a real company's quarterly earnings. You will evaluate financial and reputational drivers and communicate insights as if presenting to a senior leadership team.

Your work should combine research, critical thinking, and strategic insight, resulting in a comprehensive written case study and presentation. Detailed instructions and team assignments will be provided early in the semester.

Grading for the course follows current UF grading policies for assigning grade points (see

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A = 93.0-100%.

A- = 90.0-92.99%. B+ = 87.0-89.99%. B = 83.0-86.99%. B- = 80.0-82.99%. C+ = 77.0-79.99%.

C = 74.0-76.99%. C- = 70.0-73.99%. D+ = 67.0-69.99%. D = 64.0-66.99%. D- = 60.0-63.99%. E = below 60%

Further information about grades and grading policy may be found at this [link to the university grades and grading policies](#).

Course Professionalism and Policies

- Students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates and the professor. This course values and respects the diverse experiences, identities, and viewpoints of all students. We aim to foster a classroom environment in which everyone feels safe and encouraged to participate.
- All work must reflect professional standards – avoid any inappropriate or unsafe content.
- Students are expected to attend classes on time and not leave early unless prior permission is granted. *Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade and be sure to show up and speak up as appropriate.*
- Cameras on during Zoom classes unless you have pre-arranged an exception with the professor.

Other Important Notes from the Instructor

- **Late work:** Late assignments lose 5% per weekday unless pre-approved.
- **Communication with Instructor:** I can be reached via email (fordp@ufl.edu), or by telephone or text (703-966-8138). While I always strive to respond in a timely way, please be aware that I may not always be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 24 hours for a response.
- **Guest policy:** Students are not permitted to bring guests to class unless pre-arranged with me or TA Eva Pantoja in advance.
- **We are here to help:** If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, it is crucial that you speak with me immediately or as soon as possible. Please feel free to contact me about any concerns or comments you might have about this class. Ideally, every student in the class should plan to have at

least one 1:1 Zoom or phone meeting with me during the semester – I can meet with you during office hours or at other times, but I ask that you reach out in advance and schedule an appointment.

- **Academic integrity:** Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “E” for the course and possible disciplinary action.
- **Original work:** Do not submit the same work to more than one class without prior written permission from both professors. Do not adapt work from another class for this class without my prior written permission. Do not adapt someone else's work and submit it as your own. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.
- **Effective writing:** Spelling counts, as do grammar, punctuation, and professional presentation techniques, so edit and proofread materials carefully.
- **Presentation skills:** If you need extra help with presentation skills, arrange an appointment with me.