Georgetown University
MPS Public Relations & Corporate Communications Program
640 Massachusetts Avenue, Washington DC 20001

Course: Media Relations / MPPR 710-01
Instructor: Prof. Alexandra M. Merceron
Office Hours: Arranged by appointment.
Class Meets: Wednesdays, 8pm to 10:30pm
Location: Room C-221  Term: Spring 2015

Course Description: This course is designed to help you better understand the role and practice of media relations and messaging in corporate, non-profit, and government organizations in this new media era. You will learn how to research media and reporters, develop messages, build strategic media plans, generate media coverage, serve as spokespeople, handle crisis situations, and use new media strategies. You will hear from media and public relations professionals on such topics as working with reporters, developing PR campaigns, and creating effective web outreach programs. Class discussions, reading assignments, research and writing projects, group projects, and case studies offer an engaging and interactive learning environment to expand and apply your knowledge of media relations and messaging.

Learning Objectives: By the end of the term, you will be able to:
- Practice media relations in a range of organizational settings
- Plan, implement and manage media and new media programs
- Develop messages and build conversations with target audiences
- Identify and cultivate key media relationships
- Conduct media interviews with print, broadcast and online outlets
- Sharpen your critical thinking and communication skills

Attendance: Attendance is necessary for success in this class. If you miss more than two classes, your final grade will drop a grade level (from a B to a B-). Special circumstances (i.e. documented illness, death in the family, religious observances) should be discussed with me immediately to receive consideration. In the event you need to miss a class, please notify the instructor by e-mail prior to the start of the class. It will be your responsibility to get the day’s class notes from another classmate. Please note that work-related issues and work-related scheduling conflicts are not considered special circumstances.

Email/Correspondence: Email is the preferred mode of communication with your professor. Any email sent within business hours will receive a response with 24 hours. Please include the course name (Media Relations) in your subject line. Homework assignments are only accepted via email when specified on an assignment description sheet. For email submission of homework, please include the course name and assignment number in the subject line (i.e. Media Relations HW4)
**Work Submitted and Presented:** Assignments are expected to be of professional, “executive-ready” quality and submitted on time. All assignments will be completed individually with grades individually awarded (i.e., no group grades); however, peer input will be used to help provide real-world feedback and a diversity of perspectives. Assignments will be evaluated for content and presentation. Assignments should be submitted in hard copy form, at the start of class (8:00p) on the day it is due. Late work will lose one letter grade per day it is late. If you are to miss a class, you must still turn in assignments due that day, by email by 8:00p. Extenuating circumstances should be discussed ahead of time to receive consideration; however, job demands will not warrant extensions.

**Required Reading:** Weekly reading will be assigned and/or posted in Blackboard, as indicated on the syllabus. The required textbook for this course is:


**Class Participation/News Digest:** The success of the class depends in part on the value of contributions made by you and the other students. You are expected to contribute as an active participant and an attentive listener. In addition to regular participation in discussions, each class will begin with a five-minute News Digest. We will discuss current news, media and new media trends, and issues of interest. Students will be able to sign up for a day to present a News Digest at the start of the term. Your participation in News Digest is part of your class discussion grade.

**Assignments:** There are a total of **FIVE graded homework assignments, ONE group project** as well as in class exercises & impromptu presentations that count towards your final grade. A general description of the written assignments follows. Assignment instruction sheets containing more information will be distributed in class. Dates and topics may change slightly as we move through the semester. Any changes will be discussed in class beforehand.

**ASSIGNMENT #1 (10 %): Media and Reporter Research Presentation** - Select a media outlet and reporter. Conduct research to gather the following information for your selection:

- **a) Media outlet overview** (audience figures, frequency, history, publisher/media owner, target audience); Key editorial sections or news programming information; Extent of online presence

- **b) Reporter profile including beats and columns if applicable. Review of recent articles/stories (what has the reporter been covering?). Review of blog posts or Tweets. Analysis of their writing/reporting style. Do they use quotes, facts, outside experts, unnamed sources?**
c) Based on what you learned, how would you pitch this reporter if you were doing PR for a company or organization he/she covers? How would you interact with the reporter on his/her blog or Twitter account?

You will submit this assignment to your professor typed Word or PDF document (12pt font, 1” margins) and share the highlights of your findings in a brief (1-2 minute) oral presentation to the class.

** ASSIGNMENT #2 (10 %): Message Strategy & Development. ** Develop a message strategy and key messages for a scenario to be provided using format provided with a one page rationale for your choices.

** ASSIGNMENT #3 (10 %): Media List Development. ** Based on the message strategy and development work done in assignment #2, develop a media list of at least 15 contacts you would consider high priority targets for pitching your client’s messages in hopes of securing media coverage.

** ASSIGNMENT #4 (10 %): Op-Ed/Blog Post Writing Assignment. ** Each student will be assigned to write a 600 to 800 word op-ed or blog post based on the issue discussed during their in-class group project work. Include a list of three outlets where you would recommend trying to place the piece.

** ASSIGNMENT #5 (15 %) Crisis/Case Analysis. ** Identify a public figure, company or organization that has recently faced a high profile crisis or communication challenge. Describe the situation and the public response that followed. What was their messaging strategy? How would you describe their approach to media relations? Did the person, company or organization handle the crisis effectively? Why or why not? If you had led their response team, what actions would you have recommended? (3 pages max + 3 minute class presentation).

** GROUP PROJECT (25%). Developing a Media Relations Plan. ** Students will be divided into teams of 4 or 5 at the midpoint of the semester. Each group will be assigned a company with a consumer initiative that requires media relations support. Teams will spend the last 6 weeks of the course collaborating to develop a media relations plan in support of that company initiative. Teams will also deliver a 10 to 15 minute presentation that explains their plan. A detailed project description outlining the requirements of this assignment will be provided in class and posted online.

** Grading ** Assignments are worth 80% and class participation is worth 20% of final grades in this course (100% total). The standard 100 point grading scale used is as follows:

- A = 93 to 100%
- A- = 92.99 to 90%
- B+ = 89.99 to 88%
- B = 87.99 to 83%
- B- = 82.99 to 90%
- C = 79.99 to 70%
- F = 69.99 to 0%

** Written Assignments**—Grades for written assignments are based on:
- **Completeness**—Is the assignment completed correctly?
- **Quality**—Are ideas and research information communicated effectively?
- **Creativity**—Does the assignment demonstrate creative and strategic thinking?
- **Comprehensiveness**—Are multiple options, solutions, or ideas considered?

** Oral Presentations**—On projects that involve a written and oral presentation, grading is split 50 percent on the paper and 50 percent on the presentation based on:
Quality—Did the presentation convey the key points of this assignment?
Clarity—Was the information presented clearly and effectively?
Time—Was the presentation delivered in the time allotted?

Class Discussion—Grading criteria for in class discussions will be based on:
Originality and Quality—Were comments or questions thoughtful and related to the discussion. Student’s willingness to participate in discussion. Demonstrated ability to listen and respond with appropriate comments/questions.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES
Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program
  202-687-4246
  http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/

- Academic Resource Center
  202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
  http://ldss.georgetown.edu/

- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
  202-687-6985
  http://caps.georgetown.edu/

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY
Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM
All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.
PLAGIARISM
Stealing someone else’s work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as “the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another.” More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out http://www.plagiarism.org.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION
The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of the agenda. The instructors will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.

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**MEDIA RELATIONS 2015 COURSE SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS #1: Jan 14</th>
<th>FOCUS/TOPIC</th>
<th>READINGS &amp; HOMEWORK DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course Overview &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>-N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Exercise:</strong></td>
<td>Students will be asked to pair up and write a “press release” about their partner, which will be read aloud in class.</td>
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<td><strong>Overview of Assignment #1:</strong> Media &amp; Reporter Research project will be explained.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS #2: Jan 21</th>
<th>FOCUS/TOPIC</th>
<th>READINGS &amp; HOMEWORK DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecture: Effective Messaging</td>
<td>-Assignment #1 due in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Goals of messaging</td>
<td>-Read Ch. 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Messaging mapping strategies</td>
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<td>-Good vs. bad messaging</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Exercise:</strong></td>
<td>Students will be divided into small groups and given a company/scenario for which well-developed messaging is needed. Each group will be asked to create 3 key messages with supporting points.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Overview of Assignment #2:</strong> Message Development homework assignment will be explained</td>
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<tr>
<th>CLASS #3: Jan 28</th>
<th>FOCUS/TOPIC</th>
<th>READINGS &amp; HOMEWORK DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecture: Working with Reporters</td>
<td>-Read Ch. 3 &amp; 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Developing media lists</td>
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<td>-Building relationships</td>
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-Understanding the social media engagement
-Tools of the trade: PR Software / Library Resources

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**#4: Feb 4**

**Lecture: Media Outreach & Pitching**

- Overview of pitching
- Targeted pitches
- Dos and don’ts

**Exercise:** Using the messaging developed in Assignment #2, identify a media outlet/reporter develop your pitch and simulate outreach in pairs.

**Overview of Assignment #3:** Media List Development

Homework assignment will be explained.

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**#5: Feb 11**

**Lecture: Emerging/Social Media & Media Relations**

- Social media and journalism
- Social media and public relations
- Social media relations outreach strategies

- Read Ch. 6 and PDF5 (Blackboard)

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**#6: Feb. 18**

**Lecture: Writing for the Media**

- Writing for the eye
- Writing for the ear
- Writing for social media & the web

- Read PDF-6a & 6b (both in Blackboard)

**Exercise:** In-class writing assignment. Students will be given product or service and be asked to prepare a press release in support of its launch.

**Overview of Assignment #4:** Op-Ed/Blog Post homework assignment will be explained.

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**#7: Feb 25**

**Lecture: Media Training**

- Conducting interviews
- Identifying/preparing spokespeople
- Getting your message across
- Handling hostile audiences/reporters
- Review and critique of media interviews

- Read Ch. 5
**Exercise:** Students will prepare questions for and conduct mock interviews in class.

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**#8: Mar 4**

**Lecture: Crisis Communication**
- Developing a crisis communication plan
- Message preparation
- Review of recent media crises

**Assignment #4** due in class.

**Exercise:** Students will divided into groups and asked to craft a crisis response. Each group will represent a different organization involved in and/or impacted by the crisis and deliver a public statement.

**Overview of Assignment #5:** Crisis Response homework assignment will be explained.

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**#9: Mar 18**

**Lecture: Media Relations Planning**
- Structure/Components of a plan
- Supporting objectives
- Media Relations Tactics
- Measuring success

**Reading:** Read Ch. 10 and PDF-9 (Blackboard)

**Final Group Project: Communications Plan**
The class will be divided into teams by this date, and requirements for the final project will be distributed and discussed in class.

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**#10: Mar 25**

**Lecture: Experiential PR & Media Relations**
- Press conferences
- Live events and “publicity stunts”
- Tours and demonstrations
- Conferences & trade shows

**Assignment #5** in-class presentations delivered.

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**#11: Apr 1**

**Workshop: Journalists’ Panel** – In class check-in and peer review of team project progress.

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**#12: Apr 8**

**Lecture: Non-Profit Media Relations**
- Media relations as primary strategy

**Reading:** Read PDF-13
- Messaging around issues
- Finding creative angles

#13: Apr 15  Guest Speakers: Journalists’ Panel. Local and national news editors will discuss current newsroom practices that govern what stories get covered where, when and by whom

#14: Apr 22  Lecture: The Media Relations Career Landscape
-What employers are looking for
-Developing the right skill set
-Finding the jobs: agency vs. client-side

IN-CLASS PROJECT CHECK-IN - Groups meet to discuss their projects and provide an informal report on progress.

#15: May 6  FINAL PROJECTS/ PRESENTATIONS DUE IN CLASS