MPPR-906-01: Communications for Donor Engagement
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-Public Relations and Corporate Communications
Mondays, 8:00pm to 10:20pm | Spring 2015

Instructor: Evan C. Parker
Downtown Campus, Room C220
  • Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Every non-profit organization is a fundraising organization, as every organization’s success on the ground is enabled by the funds coming through the door. Critical to this success is the ability of a non-profit to “convert” the public, and move their target audiences from observers to supporters, to donors, to ambassadors for the brand.

This course will explore why people support non-profits, how generation and position in the “conversion lifecycle” impacts their support for causes, and how to craft (and evaluate) a strategy that goes beyond just informing and educating, but actually drives behavior. As part of the class, students make low-dollar donations to a non-profit of their choice, and analyze the organization's resulting messaging, fundraising and marketing materials over the course of the semester.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

• Develop and execute supporter-focused communications strategies, with industry-leading best practices to motivate and activate supporters.
• Move supporters “up the pyramid” to become better and more attentive, including how non-profits view the full conversion lifecycle of a supporter.
• Compare and contrast the types of non-profit target audiences and explain how different segments of the audience (age, lifecycle, demographics) view their relationship with a non-profit differently.
• Strategize the components of a successful supporter outreach program, including measuring and evaluating overall program success and testing individual program elements.
• Serve as a key part of a non-profit marketing, membership, or philanthropy initiative, or (for people outside of the non-profit sphere) use supporter-focused tactics to further your business goals.

REQUIRED READING

Given the nature of the subject matter, there is no single, comprehensive “textbook” to be purchased for this class. Instead, we will use shorter readings such as scientific reviews and studies, fundraising white papers, vertical media coverage (“trade press”), and other similar publications. While not unified into a single textbook, it is critical that students are prepared to discuss these assigned readings in class.
ATTENDANCE

University policy states that missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in a further reduction of the final grade. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or even events outside of the control of the student – you must let the instructor know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES

In respect to those around you, the use of communications technology or any kind of messaging or social media regardless of device (including smartphones, laptops or tablets) will be relegated to breaks. The use of smartphones is distracting, so please keep them in your bags and on silent (please note that “vibrate” is not silent).

In addition, you are expected to be respectful of others in the classroom, and to not be dismissive of others’ views. You are welcome to bring food or drink to the classroom, but please be prepared to share.

ASSIGNMENTS

The class will have three major assignments, as well as a series of smaller activities that will be evaluated as part of your class participation grade:

Class Participation

Success in this course is dependent on students’ ability to synthesize and analyze primary sources and raw non-profit supporter communications, drawing out overarching themes and conclusions. As such, much of your success in class participation will be tied to your weekly preparation for class.

Most weeks, you’ll be asked to execute a small assignment in preparation for next week’s class, from selecting a nonprofit to support, to reading their conversion materials, to analyzing their target audiences, etc. Most weeks, you’ll be asked to email the notes you take as part of this assignment to the instructor before class begins. These assignments will factor into your weekly participation grade as described below.

There is a maximum of 45 participation points available from the 12 lecture classes during this semester (the remaining three classes will be primarily presentations, so you won’t be graded for participation). By default, you will get 3 points each class for being present, prepared and participatory. In special circumstances, you will get a 4th point for being exceptional in either your preparation (e.g. the weekly assignment described above) or in-class participation -- up to the 45 point maximum. You will receive less than 3 points if you are have not adequately completed the preparatory readings, did unsatisfactory work on your preparation assignment, or were anti-social during the class session (i.e.
smartphone use outside of breaks, use of laptop/tablet for reasons other than note-taking, or being dismissive of others’ views).

The instructor will report a midterm participation grade, with specific recommendations on how to correct any issues over the course of the remaining semester.

**Case Study #1: Organizational Presence**

Students will systematically review a non-profit organization and its brand identity as defined through supporter communications in a 1,500 to 2,500-word memo. The students will include the following elements of the brand’s conversion plan, including the:

- Organization’s objectives,
- Primary audience segments to reach those objectives,
- Elements of the organization’s case for giving, and
- Primary messages/call to actions to convert those audiences.

In each section, the student will describe what the organization is trying to do, including endnotes to original source materials, and praise or critique that approach using the science-based drivers of support previously discussed.

Quality assignments will review a wide range of donor communications, including (but not limited to) website content, direct mail, email (especially welcome series and post-donation series), annual reports and brand videos. Please do not consider non-donor communications (i.e. traditional media coverage, the majority of social media content, or thought leader outreach) as the focus should be on understanding how the organization attempts to acquire, engage and renew their supporters.

The final product will be 1,500 to 2,500-word memo, not including endnotes or appendices. All papers should be typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced and using a standard academic referencing format such as MLA or Chicago Style. Please include your name, the assignment title, and the date on the assignment, and please number your pages. The paper will be graded on the quality and comprehensiveness of the analysis, as well as quality execution of the paper’s mechanics (i.e. structure, grammar, endnotes).

**The assignment is due Monday, 09 February 2015, by 8:00pm.** All assignments should be submitted via the class Blackboard site at [http://campus.georgetown.edu/](http://campus.georgetown.edu/).

Selected students will be asked to discuss their case study during the following class based on the quality of their work and the lessons that can be learned from the organization they selected.

**Case Study #2: Campaign Presence**

Students will systematically review a non-profit organization marketing/membership campaign and seek to understand the supporter communications goals and donor conversion strategies that underlie the effort. The students will write a 2,100 to 3,500-word memo that discerns the following elements of the brand’s conversion plan, including the:

- Conversion campaign’s objectives and strategies,
• Primary audience segments targeted by the campaign,
• The case for support the organization makes for the campaign,
• Tactics the campaign uses, with an analysis of your view of their success.

In each section, the student will describe what the organization is trying to do, including endnotes to original source materials, and praise or critique that approach using the science-based drivers of support previously discussed.

Quality assignments will review the campaign in its entirety, including (but not limited to) website content, email (especially the initial welcome series), social media, traditional media coverage, and paid placements. If you do not have access to content behind a particular element (for instance, if emails and paid placements are unavailable because the campaign has concluded previously) please outline instead what you feel the organization should have done.

The final product will be a 2,100 to 3,500-word memo, not including endnotes or appendices. All papers should be typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced and using a standard academic referencing format. Please include your name, the assignment title, and the date on the assignment, and please number your pages. The paper will be graded on the quality and comprehensiveness of the analysis, as well as quality execution of the paper’s mechanics (i.e. structure, grammar, endnotes).

The assignment is due Monday, 30 March 2015, by 8:00pm. All assignments should be submitted via the class Blackboard site at http://campus.georgetown.edu/.

Selected students will be asked to discuss their case study during the following class based on the quality of their work and the lessons that can be learned from the organization they selected.

Final Non-profit Conversion Plan

The “capstone” project for the class will be the creation of a conversion plan for a non-profit of your choice. The class will be split into small groups, and each group will select (in conjunction with the instructor) a non-profit organization whose conversion plan needs to be improved. The teams will then work to create either a conversion campaign or an organization-wide conversion plan, and will deliver a presentation to pitch the effort to the class.

The presentation should not be seen as a creative pitch (i.e. art, mood boards, look and feel) but a strategic pitch. As such, a quality presentation will provide the class with a full understanding of goals, objectives, strategies and tactics that are required for the conversion plan to be successful.

These elements include:

Campaign Strategy element
  • Primary Goal, Objectives.
  • Organizational Messaging, Narratives and Positioning.
  • Program Metrics.

Case for Giving element
  • Who are you helping?
• What must be accomplished?
• Why your organization/campaign can uniquely meet the need.
• How can the donor be involved, and what is the benefit to them?
• Why now?

Tactics element
• Specific tactics, including an understanding of the tactic, each tactic’s audiences, and each tactic’s measure for success.
• Calendar for timing each element of the campaign.
• Budget for expenses such as paid promotion.

Quality assignments will suggest a comprehensive array of channels and tactics, such as (but not limited to) website content, email, social media, direct mail, traditional media coverage, paid placements, events and offline conversion materials.

The final product will be a 18 to 24 minute in-class presentation, a question and answer “defense” of the strategy to follow, and an accompanying PowerPoint document.

The presentation will be graded as follows:

• 25% – the quality, comprehensiveness, presentation (written and verbal), and defense of the Campaign Strategy element.
• 25% – the quality, comprehensiveness, presentation (written and verbal), and defense of the Case for Giving element.
• 25% – the quality, comprehensiveness, presentation (written and verbal), and defense of the Tactics element.
• 25% – the integration of the three elements into a unified and strategic whole.

The quality of the look and feel of the PowerPoint slides will not be a factor in the grade, so please focus primarily on the content and not making the slides look “pretty.” A PowerPoint template will be available from the instructor for those who do not wish to create their own.

Peer evaluation of fellow students may be incorporated into any or all of the grading elements described above, at the instructor’s discretion.

The final version of the presentation slides are due Monday, 04 May 2015, by 8:00pm, and should be submitted via the class Blackboard site at http://campus.georgetown.edu/. The presentation will be given (verbally) to the class that same evening.

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

In professional fundraising and marketing circles, the ability to read source materials is nearly as important to a conversation as the conclusions presented in a paper or presentation. Proper attribution increases the credibility of a strategy; they do not detract from a full appreciation of your work. As a result, please endnote extensively so that others may learn from your research.
In full disclosure, the instructor uses a plagiarism checker as a matter of course, so please make sure you are fully comfortable that the work is unassailably yours before turning it in. Plagiarized work will receive an automatic failing grade for the assignment, and will be reported to the Honor Council in accordance to University policy.

All assignments are due by the beginning of class (8:00pm) on the due date specified in the schedule, unless otherwise noted. To submit your assignments, upload them to the Blackboard course management system at [http://campus.georgetown.edu/](http://campus.georgetown.edu/). All late assignments, regardless of circumstances (e.g. circumstances within or outside of the students’ control) will receive a half letter grade reduction for each day they are late. (A day is defined, as 0 to 24 hours past the date/time it was due.) For example, an assignment turned in 30 minutes late that would otherwise earn an “A” would receive to an “A-“.

Questions about grading criteria for specific assignments should be brought to the instructor’s attention at least one week before submission of assignments, so that all students may benefit from the conversation. All grades and grading criteria are the sole discretion of the instructor.

**GRADING**

The graded assignments are weighted as follows:

1. Class Participation (including weekly preparation assignments) — 45 points.
2. Case Study on Organizational Presences — 45 points.
3. Case Study on Campaign Presences — 90 points.
4. Final Non-profit Conversion Plan — 120 points.

Total: 300 points.

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

- A: 300 – 279
- B: 263.99 – 249
- A-: 278.99 – 270
- B-: 248.99 – 240
- B+: 269.99 – 264
- C: 239.99 – 210
- F: 209.99 – 0

The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

**UNIVERSITY RESOURCES**

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

- MPS Writing Resource Program
  202-687-4246
  [http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/](http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/)
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with learning or ability differences have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Interested students should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss.georgetown.edu/) 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.

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, marketing and Public Relations careers, and it will wreck your career in academia, politics and non-profit work, 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/. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out http://www.plagiarism.org/.
COURSE SCHEDULE

The following is a course schedule, including class topics, assignment due dates, and expected guest speakers. The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of other topics based on opportunity, emerging events, and student requests. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of the agenda. The instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.

01. Audiences: Why Do People Give?
   Wed, Jan 7, 2015
   • **Lecture** — Why Do People Give? □ To Whom Do They Give? □ How Do Supporters Make Their Decisions?

02. Audiences: Conversion Lifecycle and the Non-Profit Landscape
   Mon, Jan 12, 2015

03. Audiences: Generations and Segmentation
   Date TBD (Class to be rescheduled due to Federal holiday).
   • **Lecture** — The Changing Face of the U.S. □ Generations and Non-Profit Support (Millennial, Generation X, Baby Boomers, Silent Generation) □ Common Non-Profit Audience Segments.

04. Strategy: Positioning, Messaging, and Calls to Action
   Mon, Jan 26, 2015
• Lecture — Case For Giving: Does Your Non-Profit Deserve to Exist? □ Research-Driven Messaging □ Conversion-First Communications Plan, Part 1: Message Strategy □ Crafting Compelling Calls to Action.


05. Strategy: Narratives and Content Planning
Mon, Feb 2, 2015

• Reading Due – Watch Jessica Jackley, “Poverty, Money and Love."
• Special Guest — Dr. Jerry Johnson, Brodeur Partners, on message planning and research.
• Lecture — Non-Profit Content Narratives □ Conversion-First Communications Plan, Part 2: Content Strategy □ Writing For Conversion.

06. Strategy: Listening & Evidence Based Programs
Mon, Feb 9, 2015

• Assignment Due — Case Study #1.
• Guest Lecture — Robyn Castellani, Castle & Spark, on behavioral economics.
• Lecture — What Does It Mean To Be Evidence-Based? □ Metrics That Matter □ Conversion and Channel Metrics □ Operating a Listening Program □ Testing for Conversion Plans.

07. Case Study: Organizations
Mon, Feb 23, 2015

• Reading Due – Case study of non-profit rebranding, provided by instructor.
• Guest Lecture — David Connell and Bridget Lowell, Urban Institute, on organizational rebranding.
• Review — Select Organizations from Case Study #1.

08. Tactics: Acquisition, Marketing and Promotion
Mon, Mar 2, 2015

• Reading Due – Collection of acquisition, marketing and promotion emails/direct mails from non-profits, provided by instructor.
• Lecture — Acquisition Channels and Segments □ Examples of Acquisition Programs □ Paid Promotion and Content Marketing □ Evaluating Acquisition Programs.
09. Tactics: Getting to "Yes" ... Quickly  
Mon, Mar 16, 2015
- **Reading Due** – Collection of conversion emails/direct mails from non-profits, provided by instructor.
- **Special Guest** – Begoña Vázquez-Santos, The Nature Conservancy, on metrics-driven fundraising and reaching international audiences.
- **Lecture** — What Is The Conversion Funnel? □ Conversion Channels and Segments □ The Future of Non-Traditional Conversion □ Examples of Conversion & Upgrade Programs □ Evaluating Conversion Programs.

10. Tactics: Stewardship, Engagement and Retention  
Mon, Mar 23, 2015
- **Reading Due** – Collection of stewardship and retention emails/direct mails from non-profits, provided by instructor.

11. Strategy: High-Dollar Donor Communications  
Mon, Mar 30, 2015
- **Assignment Due** — Case Study #2.
- **Special Guest** – Christina Walker, YWCA, on major giving strategies.
- **Lecture** — What’s Different About Major/Middle Donor Philanthropy? □ Content Segmentation for High-Dollar Audiences.

12. Case Study: Campaigns  
Mon, Apr 13, 2015
- **Review** — Select Campaigns from Case Study #2.
- **Lecture** – Year-end Fundraising □ Budgeting and Calendaring for Campaigns □ Motivating and Harnessing Supporters During Crises.

13. Open Salon  
Mon, Apr 20, 2015
- **Reading Due** – Watch Dan Palotta, “The Way We Think About Charities is Dead Wrong.”
- **Special Guest** – Melissa Wyers, Breakthrough Strategies, on fundraising campaigns.
14. Technology

Mon, Apr 27, 2015

- **Lecture** — Optimizing Websites for Supporters □ Content Platforms □ CRMs/eCRMs □ Data Integration □ Fundraising Technology □ Offline Databases.

15. Final Project

Mon, May 4, 2015

- **Assignment Due** — Non-Profit Conversion Plan.
- **Review** — Non-Profit Conversion Plan presentations.