MPPR-755-40: DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-Public Relations and Corporate Communications

Wednesdays, 6PM – 9:20 PM | Summer 2015

Professor: Alexandra M. Merceron

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Class Location: 640 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20001 Room C219

Office Hours: Scheduled by appointment, only.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course will provide students with a general understanding and working knowledge of digital communications strategies and tactics for the modern business environment. Students will learn to approach various communications challenges in an integrated fashion by leveraging digital channels to augment and enhance traditional public relations and marketing tactics. The course will survey emerging and existing technologies and teach students how to best use these sites and interact with online communities on both a personal and professional level. The class will highlight specific digital case studies, encourage hands-on participation and offer an analysis of effective online communication and internet strategies.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

• Students will learn how to analyze complex public relations and communications challenges, create digital solutions and provide strategic counsel.
• Develop comprehensive strategies designed to best integrate digital tactics into traditional communications plans.
• Gain an in depth understanding of the modern media landscape and evolving communications practices in an effort to gain strategic competitive advantage.
• Develop a familiarity of effective online tools and methods such as content development, online community building, engagement strategy, search engine optimization, monitoring, measurement, interpreting analytics, mobile communications, video, etc.
• Review effective digital and integrated campaign case studies to highlight best practices and draw parallels for coursework.

REQUIRED READING

• The New Rules of Marketing & PR: How to Use Social Media, Online Video, Mobile Applications, Blogs, News Releases, and Viral Marketing to Reach Buyers Directly
  by David Meerman Scott (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; 4th edition, July 1, 2013)
  ISBN: 978-1118488768 ($13 on Amazon)

• Winning the Zero Moment of Truth
  Jim Lecinski, Google
These required texts will be supplemented by timely news articles, blog posts or current events throughout the semester. Beyond the assigned text readings, I strongly encourage you to read the following blogs on a regular basis:

Mashable (http://mashable.com)  
TechCrunch (http://techcrunch.com)  
CNET news (http://news.cnet.com/digital-media)  
Read/Write Web (http://readwrite.com)  
eMarketer (http://www.emarketer.com/Articles)  
TWiT: This Week in Tech (http://twit.tv)

In addition to the weekly web reading, social media monitoring, watching and listening, there are also readings from the required texts listed below.

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. In the event that you must miss class, please notify me as soon as possible PRIOR to your planned absence to make arrangements for early submission of work. As outlined by the university, 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 further reduction of the final grade.** If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES**

A successful class depends on the active engagement of all students. The use of mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets in class is prohibited unless specifically related to current lessons or coursework. Otherwise, please turn these off before class starts.

During class discussions, opinions are welcomed and viewpoints are encouraged as long as expressed constructively and respectfully. What happens in class stays in class unless you receive permission from the instructor to share something.

**ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEWS:**

Your assignments should meet Georgetown University’s standard of excellence. Detailed assignment descriptions and grading rubrics will be provided for all assigned work. There are **FOUR** writing assignments for this class:

1. **Digital Diagnosis** – Select a company or organization with which you have some familiarity. Visit their website and evaluate it based on your personal point of view. Type out three to five bullet points of both likes and dislikes from a digital standpoint. Be prepared to discuss in class from additional target audience perspectives based on messaging and/or key business objectives.

2. **Digital Footprint** – Use the Internet (search engines) to research and compile information about an individual or organization. Compose a brief memo outlining some of the findings and general themes about them online, both positive and negative, from external sources such as blogs, news sites, competitors, etc. Provide general recommendations on how to positively influence their current digital presence.

3. **Digital Strategy Case Analysis** – An organizational case study will be provided for all students in the course to read and analyze. Students will also be asked to answer a series of questions in response to the case in order to demonstrate their understanding of key concepts in digital strategy development.
4. **Final Project** – The class will be divided into groups. Each will be responsible for producing a final project that will consist of a paper and a group presentation which will be delivered during the last class or two of the semester. More details will be made available as the semester progresses.

Please follow these guidelines for your work:

- Include student name, course number and assignment title
- Double spaced work
- Cite references; refer to APA Style for Electronic Media ([www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org))
- All assignments are due in hard copy at the beginning of class (6pm EST) on the designated due date.

**Late work will not be accepted under any circumstance.**

**GRADING**

Your course grade will be based on the following:

- 80 points = Digital Diagnosis & Digital Footprint
- 30 points = Case Study Analysis
- 30 points = Class Participation
- **60 points = Final Project Presentation**
- **200 points = Total**

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

The grading scale will be assigned accordingly:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100 – 93</td>
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<tr>
<td>A−</td>
<td>92.99 – 90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89.99 – 88</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>87.99 – 83</td>
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<tr>
<td>B−</td>
<td>82.99 – 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>79.99 – 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>69.99 – 0</td>
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A warning will be provided 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 main campus or at the downtown location:

- **MPS Writing Resource Program**
  (202) 687-4246
  [http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/](http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/)

- **Academic Resource Center**
  (202) 687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
  [http://ldss.georgetown.edu/](http://ldss.georgetown.edu/)

- **Counseling and Psychiatric Services**
  (202) 687-6985
  [http://caps.georgetown.edu/](http://caps.georgetown.edu/)
Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action (IDEAA)
https://ideaa.georgetown.edu/
(202) 687-4798

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 at (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 the workplace, 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE – SUMMER 2015

5/20/15  Class #1 – Overview
Overview of class expectations, assignments
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 1, 2

5/27/15  Class #2 – 1’s & 0’s: Building Blocks of the Internet
Understanding the foundational elements of website development
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 3, 4, 5

6/3/15   Class #3 – Social Media – Harnessing Influencers
The evolution of personal and corporate blogs, writing for the web
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 6, 8, 9, 18, 19
Assignment #1 – Digital Diagnosis - Due in Class

6/10/15  Class #4 – Social Media Pt. 2 - Content Drives Engagement
How to strategically create digital content with purpose
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 7, 20, 21

6/17/15  Class #5 – The Power of Search
Optimizing content to increase visibility at the point of inquiry
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 10, 11
Assignment #2 – Digital Foot Print - Due in Class

6/24/15  Class #6 – Online Advertising
Augmenting earned and organic reach through cutting edge digital ad platforms
Reading: New Rules, Chapter 24

7/1/15   Class #7 – Mobile
Leveraging mobile technology and geo-location data
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 17, 25
Assignment #3 – Case Study Analysis - Due in Class

7/8/15   Class #8 – Media Relations
Shrinking newsrooms, growing digital opportunities
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 22, 23

7/15/15  Class #9 – Crisis Communications
Best practices for digital engagement in the midst of a crisis
Reading: New Rules, Chapters 15, 16

7/22/15  Class #10 – Monitoring, Measurement, Metrics
Understanding and properly interpreting digital analytics
No Required Reading: Work on Final Projects

7/29/15  Class #11 – The Road Ahead
Trends and bold predictions about the future of digital communications
No Required Reading: Work on Final Projects

8/5/15   Class #12 – Final Group Project presentations (in class)

This schedule is subject to change. Please refer to Blackboard for the latest course-related information.