



MSc in Strategic Communication and Public Relations

COURSE PLAN

Name of the course: Strategic Public Relations Planning

Code of the course: 31786

Term: 2nd

Type: Compulsory

Number of credits: 7,5 ECTS

Teaching language: English

Teaching staff: Roumen Dimitrov (r.dimitrov@unsw.edu.au)

1. Course Outline

The *Public Relations Society of America* (PRSA) describes Public Relations as “the strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics”. Public relations is arguably the most strategic element in the promotional mix, which includes other professional communications such as advertising and marketing. But what sort of communication is (more, most) strategic? There are multiple answers – and even more questions – this course puts to the test. Public relations is perhaps more indirect – using telling rather than (over-) selling. Or more long-term – with an eye to the whole that is more than the sum of its elements. Or more (better) planned because planning is strategic. (Or is it?) But is not any communication strategic because it is only a means to an end – such as influence, outcome and change – which often extends beyond communicating?

The Strategic Public Relations Planning (SPRP) course aims to prepare the students to effectively apply strategic and creative communications skills. Its main goal is to foster their strategic thinking and increase their awareness of the strategic nature of Public Relations, understood as a managerial function and organisational capacity – strategy and skills – in the interaction between more or less organised publics. Students will also develop core PR skills such as planning as sense making, leadership as network agency, content writing and multimodal presentation.

As PR professionals, students will develop communication programs for business, government and non-profit organisations. The course will focus on strategic planning and communication skills. It will also



problematise the role of public relations in a changing communication environment, and especially its responses to the challenges by emerging content providers, which encroach on areas traditionally reserved for PR strategy.

2. Competences

Transversal competences

Students will learn to

- Work independently
- Reinforce skills of working in teams
- Think strategically and critically
- Understand the changing PR roles in the promotional mix
- Grasp public relations programs as communicative tools of influencing individuals, society and the economy
- Efficiently use but also critically interrogate mainstream concepts and vocabulary in the PR discipline
- Discern issues and solutions of ethical PR practice
- Build personal and professional communicative capacity, including PR strategic thinking and skills

Specific competences

They also will learn to

- Understand the main models and principles in PR theory
- Gain basic understanding of the relations between PR theory and practice
- Adequately and ethically serve to the clients' needs and demands
- Reconcile their professional (institutional, functional) and citizen (societal, activist) roles as agents of change



- Identify key phases and procedures in the strategic PR planning process
- Know how to manage strategically public relations programs
- Research publics and select targets, providing strategic solutions
- Comprehend PR as a problem-identifying, -researching and -solving communication process in an economic and social environment
- Critically identify where the internet and social media have revolutionised PR strategy – and where not

3. Contents

INTRODUCTION

- The need for strategic public relations
- Integrated communications: PR in the promotional mix
- PR strategy and tactics
- Dimensions and degrees of strategic communication
- Strategy and planning

FRST PHASE OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS: FORMATIVE RESEARCH

- PR as problem-solving practice: communicative and non-communicative solutions (strategies)
- What is formative research
- Analysing the situation: different problems – different approaches
- Analysing the organisation
- Analysing the publics: one public ('the public') does not exist



- Publics as audiences: Is PR media management?

SECOND PHASE: STRATEGY

- Goals, positioning and objectives
- Elements of objectives: target groups, change and timeline
- Types of objectives: awareness (information), attitude (acceptance) and action (behavioural) objectives
- Output and outcome
- Proactive strategies: action and communication strategies
- Elements of communicative strategy: media, message and calendar strategy
- Reactive strategies: offensive, defensive and other types
- Strategic inaction and strategic silence: PR as choreography of attention?

OFFLINE AND ONLINE STRATEGIES

- PR 2.0 and PR 3.0
- How revolutionary are social media strategies?
- Strategies of online listening and conversation
- Content provision and PR: content marketing, native advertising, brand journalism and promoted user endorsements

THIRD PHASE: TACTICS

- Tactics, techniques and actions
- Media tactics: offline and online tactics
- Advertising and promotional tactics: paid, owned, shared and free media
- Packaging the communication tactics
- Implementing the strategic plan



FOURTH PHASE: EVALUATIVE RESEARCH

- Measuring outcomes and outputs against the objectives
- What, when and how to evaluate?
- Evaluation of the implementation of awareness, attitude and action objectives
- Learning loops: how the Internet has changed strategy and, consequently, evaluation
- Data analysis and evaluation reports

PR, DISCOURSE AND CHANGE

- PR as co-construction of meaning: discursive strategies and strategic discourses
- Functional approaches to meaning: rhetoric, functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis, speech act theory and social semiotics
- Multimodality and multimedia: the layers of discourse, design, production and (re-) distribution
- PR planning beyond strategy

PR AND PROMOTION: AN UNEASY RELATION

- Commodity and promotional signs
- PR as promotional culture?
- The quest for strategy

4. Tasks assessment

1. Group exercise: Design of a Communication plan – paper and four step-by-step presentations 50% of the total mark

- Internal weights:

- Written communication plan (4-5 pages) 60% (adequacy to client's goals 20%, creativity 10%, actionable business language 20%, well-structured text layout 10%)
- Four presentations (oral, visual): 30%
- Progress through phases: 10%

2. Individual exercise: Analysis of a Case study & oral presentation: 50% of the total mark

- Internal weights:

- Case study written paper 70% (evidence-based & analytical rather descriptive 40%, clear academic language 20%, well-structured text layout 10%)
- Pecha Kucha presentation (oral, visual): 20%
- Participation in all class exercises: 10%

The evaluation of those exercises is based the following criteria:

- Adequacy to the requirements of the professional environment, including client's best interest, economic efficiency, social justice, cultural sensibility and ethical standards
- Content should be relevant to the course content. Evidence-based research – analytical, not only descriptive. Critical analysis includes reflections of own perspectives and limits.
- Assertiveness: the ability to state an opinion or analyse an issue and be persuasive and convincing to the public.
- Language: grammar, logic, clarity and coherence. Proper and relevant use of the APA citation style as an academic element of both persuasive language and factual support.



5. Exercises and assessment rubric

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE

Analysis of a case study: written submission & oral presentation
(50% of the final mark)

PART 1: Case Study paper

Description and critical evaluation of a PR campaign, focusing on:

- Overview and Background (client's brand & company)
- Agency
- Goal/s & Objective/s of the campaign
- Challenge
- Target & Stakeholders
- Strategy
- Message/s
- Techniques & tactics
- Actions: Execution & Communication (calendar)
- Evaluation & Results
- Personal opinion

Every student chooses a current or very recent campaign from their country or an international one.

The analysis should be based on:

- Evidence-based research
- Critical thinking
- Linking with the PR concepts studied in class
- References in APA style



Extension: 5-7 pages (Times New Roman fonts, 12pt. 1.5 lines space). The paper will be submitted a couple of weeks after the trimester finishes.

PART 2: Oral presentation

- Not assessed: Presentation of ideas in WEEKS 2 & 3 (2-3 PowerPoint slides)
- Assessed: Presentation of case study in WEEK 9; oral and visual: Pecha Kucha (PowerPoint, 20 slides x 20 seconds, automatic change set in Transitions, = 6 min 40 sec)

Specific assessment criteria:

- Case study written paper 70% (evidence-based research, analytical rather descriptive 40%, clear academic language 20%, well-structured text layout 10%)
- Pecha Kucha presentation (oral, visual): 20%
- Individual participation in all class exercises: 10%

GROUP EXERCISE

Design of a strategic communication plan: four phases of development and presentation (50% of the final mark)

Design of a Communication Plan

Based on the brief prepared in class, teams of about four students design and present in phases a draft of a strategic communication plan

The exercise should include the following aspects:

1. Formative research (analysis of the situation, organisation and publics)
2. Strategy (goals, objectives, target publics, media and message strategies)



3. Tactics (techniques, actions, implementation)
4. Evaluation (as another form of research)

Each one of the four phases should be collectively developed, properly explained and justified, and clearly presented and visualised.

Groups discuss and develop the four phases and team members rotate in presenting the preliminary findings.

The teacher will evaluate the teams in four increments, assessing their learning effort against the quality of development sessions and presentations. Group members rotate in presenting the results of each phase. Ideally each group member presents once.

Four oral and visual presentation in the format of Pecha Kucha (PowerPoint, 20 slides per 20 seconds each, set up in automatic transition, = 6min 40 sec).

This assessment task has a written and presentation parts. The paper will be submitted a couple of weeks after the trimester finishes.

Specific assessment criteria:

- Written communication plan (4-5 pages) 60% (adequacy to client's goals 20%, creativity 10%, actionable business language 20%, well-structured text layout 10%)
- Four presentations (oral, visual): 30%
- Progress through all phases: 10%

GENERAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Content: research on the topic, relevance to course's content and demonstration of reflexion and critical analysis over the discussed. Assertiveness: the ability to state an opinion or analyse an issue and be persuasive and convincing to the reader.

- Adequacy to the requirements of the professional environment, including client's best interest, economic efficiency, social justice, cultural sensibility and ethical standards

- Content should be relevant to the course content. Evidence-based research – analytical, not only descriptive. Critical analysis includes reflections of own perspectives and limits.
- Assertiveness: the ability to state an opinion or analyse an issue and be persuasive and convincing to the public.
- Language: grammar, logic, clarity and coherence. Proper and relevant use of the APA citation style as an academic element of both persuasive language and factual support.

6. Strategic Public Planning 2019 Calendar

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
7/1	14/1	21/1	28/1
INTRODUCTION PR, MARKETING & ADVERTISING; STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	FIRST PHASE: FORMATIVE RESEARCH	Group presentations (1: Research)	SECOND PHASE: STRATEGY
Learning Outcomes Individual and group assignments	Project development (1: Research)	Individual presentations: Ideas about case studies (Second part)	Project development (2: Strategy)
Formation of groups Presentation and discussion of client briefs Selection of a brief Allocation of group roles	Individual presentations: ideas about case studies (First part)	Individual presentations: Ideas about case studies (Third part)	PR 2.0 AND 3.0: OFFLINE AND ONLINE STRATEGIES



WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9
4/2	11/2	18/2	25/2	1/3
Group presentations (2: Strategy)	Group presentations (3: Action and Evaluation)	Group presentations (4. Evaluation and plan as a whole)	Individual presentations	SUMMARY: PR AND PROMOTION – THE QUEST FOR STRATEGY
THIRD PHASE: TACTICS	FORTH PHASE: EVALUATION	PR, DISCOURSE & CHANGE	Individual presentations	Final group presentations of communication plans
Project development (3: Tactics)	Project development (4: Evaluation)	Group and individual presentations finishing touches	Individual presentations	Round table: bettering the course design

Assessment elements:

1. Individual case study analysis (50% final mark):
 - a. Campaign analysis written paper: 30%
 - b. Pecha Kucha presentation: 10%
 - c. Class participation in all exercises: 10%

2. Group exercises and presentations (50% of final mark):
 - a. Exercise 1: Research
 - b. Exercise 2: Strategy
 - c. Exercise 3: Tactics
 - d. Exercise 4: Evaluation and sum up of plan

There is no written component for this assignment. Internal weights:

- Adequacy to client's goals 20%
- Creativity: 10%
- Presentation (oral, visual): 10%
- Progress through phases: 10%



5. Bibliography and didactic resources

5.1. Basic Bibliography

Smith, R. D. (2013). *Strategic planning for public relations*. Routledge.

5.2. Complementary Bibliography

Aronczyk, M., et al. (2017). Apprehending public relations as a promotional industry. *Public Relations Inquiry* 6(2): 139-155.

Austin, Erica Weintraub, and Bruce E. Pinkleton. *Strategic public relations management: Planning and managing effective communication programs*. Routledge, 2006.

Bentele, G. and H. Nothhaft (2010). Strategic communication and the public sphere from a European perspective. *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 4(2): 93-116.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2009). *PR strategy and application: Managing influence*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Gregory, A., & Willis, P. (2013). *Strategic public relations leadership*. Routledge.

Hallahan, K., et al. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1(1): 3-35.

Hallahan, K. (2014). Publicity under siege: A critique of content marketing, brand journalism, native advertising and promoted user endorsements as challenges to professional practice and transparency. *17th International public relations research conference*. Y. G. Ji, J. H. Liu and Z. C. Li. University of Miami Coral Gables, Florida, Institute for PR: 391-437.



Heath, R. L. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of public relations*. Sage Publications, 2013.

L'Etang, J. (2006). Public relations and rhetoric. *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: Challenges for the next generation*, 359-371.

Pieczka, M., & L'Etang, J. (2006). Public relations and the question of professionalism. *Public relations: Critical debates and contemporary practice*, 265-278.

Porter, M. E. (1996). What is strategy. *Harvard Business Review*. November-December: 61-78.

Wilcox, D. H., Cameron, G. T., & Reber, B. H. (2014). *Public relations: Strategies and tactics*, Pearson, Boston.

7. Methodology

Class lecturing and discussion seminars. Case studies review.

Course interactive portal with information and referential articles and links to support exercises and class participation.

Visits of PR professionals.