

MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations

Strategic Public Relations Planning (31786)

Term:	2 nd
Number of ECTS:	7,5 ECTS
Number of hours:	187,5
Language:	English
Instructor:	Lluís Mas

1. Course objectives

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 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 and outcomes

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. Course outline

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.

PHASE ONE: FORMATIVE RESEARCH

1. Analyzing the situation.
2. Analyzing the organization.
3. Analyzing the publics.

PHASE TWO: STRATEGY

4. Establishing Goals and Objectives.
5. Formulating Action and Response Strategies.
6. Developing the Message Strategy.

PHASE THREE: TACTICS

7. Selecting Communication Tactics.
8. Implementing the Strategic Plan.

PHASE FOUR: EVALUATIVE RESEARCH

9. Evaluating the Strategic Plan.

Each of these 9 steps will be presented theoretically in a different week during the course and will be applied to the case of these different types of PR cases:

- Media Relations.
- Internal Relations.
- Community Relations.
- Public Affairs and government relations.
- Investor and financial relations.
- Consumer relations.
- International Public Relations.
- Special Publics.
- Emergency Public Relations.
- Integrated Marketing Communications.

4. Assessment

Course assessment will be attained by the means of three elements:

- Readings, debates, seminars' attendance, and in-class participation: 10% of the final grade.
- Written and oral presentation of a pre-project on a Strategic PR Planning case study (individual): 40% of the final grade, 3000-4000 words. This is due Week 5. Internal weights:
 - Written analysis of the situation, organization, and the publics: evidence-based & analytical rather descriptive 40%, clear academic language 20%, well-structured text layout 20%.
 - Oral presentation (10 minutes): 20%.
- Strategic PR Planning Project (group project 3/4 students): 50% of the final grade, 7000-8000 words. Internal weights:
 - Formative Research (20%):
 - Secondary research:
 - Academic sources: definition of key concepts and theories (e.g. source credibility).
 - Up-to-date data and quantitative and qualitative pieces of information (rigorous private and public institutions).
 - Primary research:
 - Research question: gap/contradiction, need to update or to expand (target, culture...) from the secondary research.
 - Design the method -give specificities: materials, procedure, participants, survey questions or focus groups/interview script and protocol.
 - Strategy (30%): problem/opportunity, phrasing of objectives (impact/output), type of strategies, message strategy.
 - Tactics (20%): creativity, adequacy to client's goals, planning/execution (phases, calendar); production of materials and detailed description of actions: design/format (images, infographics, press releases, fact sheets, key messages, events...).
 - Evaluative research (10%): accurate sources or phrasing with examples connected with objectives.
 - Oral presentation (oral, visual) (15 minutes). Oral presentation is in week 10, but the written project can be submitted 10 days after last session: 20%

Attendance is compulsory at least to 80% of sessions (missing more than two sessions needs to be justified). The pre-project is mandatory and must be approved before students are allowed to engage in the final project. This is a table that sums up assessment:

Activity	Description	Weight
Attendance and participation	Participation in-class with the lectures, debates, discussion of Warc case studies and in-class progress of projects.	10%
Pre-project	Individual, to be submitted and orally presented in class on week 5.	40%
Final project	Groups of 3-4, to be submitted orally in class 10 and written 10 days after class 10.	50%

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.
- "On brand" (do your best: naming, colors, logo –sketch).
- Final recommendations: be creative, ambitious, specific, social, visual (images, clipping, screenshots, symbols...), anticipate/imagine/make arbitrary decisions (if no other feasible option available) so that you can work with all the picture all the way to the "end".

Attendance is compulsory at least to 80% of sessions (missing more than two sessions needs to be justified).

5. Bibliography and teaching resources

Basic Bibliography

Hendrix JA, Hayes DC. (2007). Public relations cases. Seventh edition. Southbank, Victoria], Australia]; Thomson/Wadsworth.

Lamb LF, McKee KB. (2005). Applied public relations: cases in stakeholder management . Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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

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.

Newsom D, Haynes J. *Public relations writing : form & style* . 7th ed. Belmont, Calif: Thomson Wadsworth; 2004.

White J, Mazur L. (1995). *Strategic communications management: making public relations work* . Wokingham [etc: Addison-Wesley.

6. Methodology

The methodology of the course may include a combination of:

- General and theoretical class presentations by the professor.
- Seminars in which readings and case of studies will be discussed.
- Personal enquiry, individual research, and readings.
- Individual, team and collaborative work & students peer review on the pre-project and the project.

Week	Activity in-class (seminar)	Activity out-class
Week 1 (10/01)	-Lecture 1 Analyzing the situation in the different PR strategies. -See Warc case studies. -In-class work.	-Readings Warc case studies. -Make progress on the analysis of the situation to discuss in class.
Week 2 (17/01)	-Lecture 2 Analyzing the organization.	-
Week 3 (24/01)	-Lecture 3 Analyzing the publics.	-Readings Warc case studies.
Week 4 (31/01)	-Lecture 4 Establishing Goals and Objectives.	-Readings Warc case studies.
Week 5 (07/02)	-Oral presentation pre-project (individual)	-Gather in groups of 3/4 and choose one case study from the individual pre-project and the subject of the final project.
Week 6 (14/02)	- Lecture 5 Formulating Action and Response Strategies.	-Readings Warc case studies.
Week 7 (21/02)	- Lecture 6 Developing the Message Strategy	-Readings Warc case studies.



Week 8 (28/02)	- Lecture 7 Selecting and implementing Communication Tactics.	-Readings Warc case studies.
Week 9 (07/03)	- Lecture 8 Evaluating the Strategic Plan.	
Week 10 (14/03)	-Group Assignment: final group presentations	