

Richard T. Robertson School of Media & Culture
MASC 488 -001: Strategic Communication of Health & Medical Issues
Spring 2015

Instructor Details

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Course Details

Class hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
Classroom: Temple 2211

Course Description

This course will help students understand the role of media and strategic communication in publics' information seeking, the formation of attitudes and beliefs about health and medical issues, as well as their health behaviors. How to close the gap of health information disparity and enhance the communication practice of health related organizations will be examined. Through case analysis, primary and secondary research, and strategic health communication design projects, the principles of strategic communication will be applied to areas such as healthcare public relations, health audience segmentation and messaging tailoring for different media forms.

Community Client Information

For the Spring 2015 semester, students in MASC 488 will be working with the **Action Alliance**. Service-learning at VCU is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs. This collaborative teaching and learning strategy is designed to promote and encourage course content, personal growth and civic engagement. Typically, a service-learning course requires a minimum of 15 hours of service with selected community-based organizations or schools. Each student team will develop a strategic social media-based campaign plan for the client, as well as present the research-based insights, as well as suggestions for future social media implementation to the client. Student teams will work with the client through the semester to provide PR service, which will be utilized by the client to communicate with its key publics in order to achieve its long-term goals.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course will introduce or develop skills beyond the introductory area in the following learning outcomes required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, by which the School of Mass Communications is accredited:

- Understand and apply the principles of freedom of speech and press.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relations to mass communications.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

Course Approach

This interactive course blends theoretical and applied approaches for communicating effectively and ethically about health and medical issues to strategic publics and among health related organizations. Classes will incorporate a variety of pedagogical approaches, including lecture, discussion, applied projects, reading reactions, class interaction, and group projects. The assignments and discussions are primarily applied in nature. Participation in all aspects of the course – attendance, active participation in class discussions, contribution demonstrated in peer evaluation, and completion of all assignments (individual and group assignments) – is expected to gain the breadth of content and achieve course objectives. Readings and assignments are due on the specified date in the syllabus.

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Articulate a critical understanding of basic theories, models and assumptions about the effects of strategic communication and health and medical issues;
2. Think strategically about the use of communications and media platforms to advance a health organization's goals and objectives and identify the strengths and weaknesses of different communications options;
3. Develop focused communications strategy and provide a rationale for the selected communications strategy, reflecting both scientific and practical considerations;
4. Analyze the public health implications of messages conveyed by traditional media, new media (including social media), and word-of-mouth communication directly and indirectly influenced by media messages;
5. Appreciate the ethical dilemmas inherent in the use of strategic communications designed to persuade people to change their behavior.

Evaluation & Grading Scheme

1.	Midterm Social Media Communication Audit	150
2.	Storify Case Study Presentation	100
3.	Final Social Media Campaign Report	200
4.	Final Client Presentation	200
5.	Participation	100
6.	Peer Evaluations (2)	200
7.	Service Learning Reflection Essay	50
	TOTAL POINTS	1000

Your final grade in the course will be calculated as follows:

A = 900 to 1000 points

B = 800 to 899 points

C = 700 to 799 points

D = 600 to 699 points

F = 599 points or below

Selected Course Readings

Du Pre, A. (2013). *Communicating about Health: Current Issues and Perspectives*, 4th ed. Oxford University Press, New York.

Additional articles of interest will be posted on Blackboard.

Email Policy

Email is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost-effective, and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU email on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking email daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student email account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU email address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety:
<http://www.ts.vcu.edu/kb/3407.html>.

VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity."

In addition, "All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases;
- Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases."

More information can be found at in the VCU policy library at <http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Honor%20System.pdf>.

Student Conduct in the Classroom

According to the Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings (<http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf>), "The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner." Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. The Student Code of Conduct also prohibits the possession of or carrying of any weapon. For more information see <http://register.dls.virginia.gov/details.aspx?id=3436>.

Students with Disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, require that VCU provide "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). Please also visit the Disability Support Services website at www.students.vcu.edu/dss and/or the Division for Academic Success website at healthsciences.vcu.edu/DAS/ for additional information.

Any student who has a disability that requires an accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chairperson of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

Statement on Military Short-Term Training or Deployment

If military students receive orders for short-term training or for deployment/mobilization, they should inform and present their orders to Military Student Services and to their professor(s). For further information on policies and procedures contact Military Services at 828-5993 or access the corresponding policies.

Excused Absences for Students Representing the University

Students who represent the university (athletes and others) do not choose their schedules. Student athletes are required to attend games and/or meets. All student athletes should provide their schedules to their instructors at the beginning of the semester. The Intercollegiate Athletic Council strongly encourages faculty to treat missed classes or exams (because of a scheduling conflict) as excused absences and urges faculty to work with the students to make up the work or exam.

Campus Emergency Information

What to Know and Do to Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts. Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor will keep his or her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor's instructions.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234).
- Report suspicious activities and objects.
- Keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

Important Dates

Important dates for the Spring 2015 semester are available at:

http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/calendar/ac_fullViewAll.asp?term=Spring+2015

VCU Mobile

The VCU Mobile application is a valuable tool to get the latest VCU information on the go. The application contains helpful information including the VCU directory, events, course schedules, campus maps, athletics and general VCU news, emergency information, library resources, Blackboard and more. To download the application on your smart phone or for more information, please visit <http://m.vcu.edu>.

Class Registration Required for Attendance

Students may attend only those classes for which they have registered. Faculty may not add students to class rosters or Blackboard. Therefore, if students are attending a class for which they have not registered, they must stop attending.

Withdrawal from Classes

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, visit the Student Services Center at 1015 Floyd Avenue (Harris Hall) and/or contact your financial aid counselor regarding the impact on your financial aid. Contact information for the University Financial Aid Office is available at <http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/contact-us/>.

Student Financial Responsibility

Students assume the responsibility of full payment of tuition and fees generated from their registration and all charges for housing and dining services, and other applicable miscellaneous charges. Students are ultimately responsible for any unpaid balance on their account as a result of the University Financial Aid Office or their third party sponsor canceling or reducing their award(s).

Course Calendar

NOTE: Calendar is subject to change.

Week 1 (January 12 & 14): Introduction; Overview of the course.

Reading: Chapter 1

Week 2 (January 21): The Social Context of Health Communication

Reading: Chapter 3; Grouping for project

Week 3 (January 26 & 28): Health Administration, HR, Marketing, and PR

Reading: Chapter 10

MEET THE CLIENT AND Q&A

Week 4 (February 2 & 4): eHealth, mHealth, and Telemedicine

Reading: Chapter 9

Week 5 (February 9 & 11): Health Images in the Media

Reading: Chapter 11

Week 6 (February 16 & 18): Public Health Crises and Health Care Reform

Reading: Chapter 12

Week 7 (February 23 & 25): Planning Health Promotion Campaigns

Reading: Chapter 13

Week 8 (March 2 & 4): Designing and Implementing Health Campaigns

Reading: Chapter 14

Midterm Social Media Communication Audit Due

Week 9 (March 9 & 11): *No Class! Enjoy your spring break! ☺*

Week 10 (March 16 & 18): Case study presentations; Guest speaker

Midterm Peer Evaluations Due

Week 11 (March 23 & 25): Case study presentations; Guest speaker

Week 12 (March 30 & April 1): Case study presentations; Guest speaker

Week 13 (April 6 & 8): Case study presentations; Guest speaker

Week 14 (April 13 & 15): Case study presentations; Guest speaker

Week 15 (April 20 & 22): Guest speaker; Health Communication Solutions for the Future

Final Social Media Campaign Report Due

Week 16 (April 27 & 29): Wrap-Up Class ; Final Client Presentations

Final Peer Evaluations Due

Service-Learning Reflection Essay Due