

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richard T. Robertson School of Media & Culture
Syllabus and Class Schedule for Spring 2016
MASC 425 Public Relations Research (Service Learning)

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Class Hours: Tuesdays 4:00-6:40 p.m.
Classroom: Temple Building 2221

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-2 p.m. (online); Thursdays 3:30-5:30 p.m. (in office)

Prerequisite: MASC 210 Public Relations, completed with a grade of C or better.

OBJECTIVES:

(1) To review recent developments in public relations research; (2) to understand the contexts and uses of research in public relations; and (3) to introduce you to how to use those research skills to facilitate public relations practice and program evaluation. Real client experience will allow you to apply the research methods to public relations practice as well as providing insights for local business development.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course reviews the latest principles of public relations with emphasis on the crucial role of research to develop informed strategy, monitor communication programs, and to evaluate overall public relations campaign effectiveness. The course imparts a managerial perspective, rather than a technical skill approach, to the use of a wide range of research methods. Students begin the semester with an extensive orientation to the types of research essential at various stages of communication planning. Lectures and projects help the student to understand specific research techniques such as content analysis, focus groups, and surveys from hands-on participation.

COMMUNITY CLIENT INFORMATION:

For the Spring 2016 semester, students in MASC 425-901 will be working with the **VCU University Relations**. 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 public relations research plan for the client, as well as present the research-based insights to the client. Student teams will work with the client through the semester to provide PR research service, which will

be utilized by the client to communicate with its key publics in order to achieve its long-term goals.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

All students must (1) complete all readings; (2) display a command of the material in exercises, discussions, and individual assignments; (3) participate as a team member in developing and presenting a research report and portfolio to the client. Assignment sheets will provide details well in advance of due dates.

TEXTBOOK (Recommended, not required):

Stacks, D. *Primer of Public Relations Research*, New York, Guilford Press, Second Edition, 2010.

EVALUATION:

Evaluation will necessarily be subjective, but the instructor makes every effort to keep students apprised of expectations. In particular, you should pay close attention to the assignment sheets and participate actively in thought questions and the exam review sessions.

Assignments (3)	300
Research Portfolio	300
Final Presentation to Client (Group Performance)	200
Peer Evaluations (2)	50
Participation (Class attendance, group meeting)	100
Service Learning Reflection	50
TOTAL POINTS	1000

Assignments and group work must meet the following academic and professional standards:

Timeliness: As a professional you will be judged on your ability to keep deadlines. Late assignments will NOT be accepted except with a doctor's excuse.

Quality of Work: You are expected to maintain the highest standards for all assignments. Therefore, you will be graded on the following:

- Accurate punctuation, grammar and spelling;
- Professional appearance and professional business writing style.

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

There will be no scheduled exams for this course. If you accomplish all the course requirements, you will receive an A. Evaluation from your client and your team members will be also taken into consideration to determine whether you fulfill your required work.

Peer evaluations: In a confidential manner, your teammates will provide feedback about your work in the middle and end of the semester using anonymous peer evaluation forms. More frequent evaluations can occur on the very rare occasion, in the instructor's experience, when an account team does not coalesce well. For example, on occasions a team member left a team (fired or resigned) to create his/her own research report and presentation.

Participation specifications:

1. Attend all class and team meetings.
2. Attend all team group meetings with the instructor.
3. Participate in the collection of primary and secondary research.
4. Read assigned material if there is any.
5. As part of a team, complete your research assignment and work with team members to complete the research portfolio and report.
6. Prepare and participate in the verbal and visual presentations of your team's recommendations.
7. Complete individual mid-term and final peer evaluations.

CLASS RULES:

1. Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes. If you are unable to attend class, please notify Dr. B by email, by phone or in person of your planned absence **BEFORE** class. Missing two classes without excuses will significantly drop your final grade. You must present documentation of your absence, and you must make up any missed assignments.

2. Please turn off your cellular phones before class begins. In class, you may not sleep, wear headphones or use electronic devices for purposes not related to the class content. We will have discussion sessions so please do not conduct side conversations or create other disruptions. Be on time for class and plan on meeting for the entire class period.

EMAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA ETIQUETTE

Professional email and social media correspondence both a key factor and component not only for this class, but also for your future job prospects after graduation. Setting a good first impression with your email and social media writing is key. Treat each email, tweet, snap, and update as you would if you were working at an agency or for a brand. Today, it's essential to have strong [social media](#) and email etiquette skills.

Please be professional when writing emails to the instructor – and make sure that correct spelling and grammar is used. I will respond to emails as soon as possible. Make sure to check your University Email daily! Make it a habit. You can work with the HelpDesk to have your University email forwarded to an account you already check daily.

Other things to keep in mind for our class this semester:

- Check the syllabus and Blackboard: Part of your responsibility as a student is to make sure your question cannot be easily answered from the syllabus or a resource already posted on Blackboard. **Students who send emails that fall into this category will be deducted participation points.** Part of participating in this class is being aware and present, and that includes knowing where to find class resources.

- Professional Format: Please be professional when writing emails to the instructor – and make sure that correct spelling and grammar is used. Put your name and the title of the class in the subject line. I will respond to emails as soon as possible.
- Golden Rule for Writing Professionally is about respect: If you wouldn't write an email or tweet to your boss, then do not write it to me. Treat this class as you would in your dream job with your boss and fellow colleagues. If you treat me with respect in your writing and correspondence for class, I will do the same for you.
- Addressing the Professor: Please address the email as Dr. B. I will not respond to emails that do not start off with this introduction. This also is key for social media correspondence as well.
- Proper Spelling and Grammar for Email and Social Media: Make sure to check for spelling and grammar – **if I see a spelling/grammar mistake, I will either not answer the email or grade the email as part of your participation grade for this course.**
- Emojis: Emojis are okay if professional on social media correspondence for the class, but not appropriate for email.
- Email signatures: Create a professional signature for your email address. Even if you are typing from an iPhone / iPad / Surface / Android / etc.
- Resources: Email Etiquette from [Purdue Owl](#) and Social Media [Resources](#) & Guides

CLASS SCHEDULE

The tentative course outline is listed below.

Any necessary changes in the schedule will be announced in class.

Week #1 (January 19): Course Introduction

Week #2 (January 26): ****NO IN-CLASS MEETING, ONLINE CHECK IN****

Week #3 (February 2): The Role of Research in Public Relations

Week #4 (February 9): ****MEET THE CLIENT****

Week #5 (February 16): The Process of PR Research: objectives, research questions to evaluation
Grouping for research project

Week #6 (February 23): Qualitative Research Methods & Operationalization and Measurement

Week #7 (March 1): Survey Research Methods
Assignment 1 Due

Week #8 (March 8): ****NO CLASS – ENJOY YOUR SPRING BREAK!!****

Week #9 (March 15): Sampling Techniques

Week #10 (March 22): Content Analysis
Assignment 2 Due

Week #11 (March 29): Research Ethics ****CLASS WILL BE HELD ONLINE****
Mid-term Peer Evaluation Due

Week #12 (April 5): Data Analysis
Assignment 3 Due

Week #13 (April 12): Final Written Project Preparation (team meeting with the instructor)

Week #14 (April 19): Final Written Project Preparation (team meeting with the instructor)

Week #15 (April 26): Wrap-up and Service Learning Reflection
Written Research Report Due

Week #16 (May 3): **Research Presentations to the Client**
Final Peer Evaluation & Service Learning Reflection Due

University Policies

VCU 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

You can view important dates for the Fall 2015 semester in the university calendar (http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/ac_fullViewAll.asp?term=Fall+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).

**Content last updated July 2014*