

Syllabus

COMM 466T: Public Relations in U.S. Higher Education

Course meeting days/ times: Wednesdays, 4-6:45 p.m.

Course meeting location: TBA

Instructor:

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Course description

This course explores the application of public relations theory, concepts, and practice within the United States higher education community. Students will trace the development of higher education in America and the factors that led to establishment and then abandonment of the public sector's social contract to encourage and support college education for young people. Current economic, organizational, political, social, and cultural problems in higher education will be examined with a focus on how public relations strategies are employed to build relationships between U.S. higher education institutions and publics/stakeholders. Through an enhanced understanding of the communication challenges facing higher education in general, students will be able to more clearly see how their academic progress and future potential is affected by a myriad of organizational and communicative variables. This course may be taken for graduate credit.

Prerequisites

Either COMM 346 or COMM 350 or COMM 361 or consent of instructor

Learning outcomes

Through completion of COMM 466T, students should meet the following learning outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate mastery level knowledge of the history and development of U.S. higher education, and the many obstacles to success faced by universities and their stakeholders.
 - Students will demonstrate mastery level knowledge of contemporary public relations theory and practice, and relevant organizational theory and practice.
 - Students will analyze problems and opportunities in higher education through the lens of public relations, offering informed critique of strategic communications responses offered or proposed.
 - Students will use social media to demonstrate a creative, relevant application of public relations to build stakeholder relationships and address a particular current issue in higher education.
 - Students will develop a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by university public relations educators, and the issues faced by students in a higher education system fraught with economic, organizational, political, social, and cultural uncertainties.
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Departmental Learning Outcomes

Each of the five Communications subject concentrations offers students a different type of preparation for a communications career. All concentrations are similar in that their ultimate goal is to allow the development of graduates who are articulate, intelligent citizens who can think critically and communicate effectively. Learning Outcomes have been established to verify that our graduates are prepared for the realities they will face as communicators in the 21st Century. To view those Learning Outcomes, visit the Department web page.

Syllabus as agreement for learning

This syllabus is a contract between you and me. I will follow the syllabus to eliminate surprises in terms of what's expected of you in this course. I will adhere to the guidelines of the syllabus to make sure the course is as fair as possible to all students. Please do not ask for special consideration that is contrary to the syllabus; it is unfair for me to give one student an advantage that is not offered to everyone. *Receipt of this syllabus constitutes agreement on your part to all the terms contained within the syllabus.*

The course will be managed in part through TITANium, CSUF's online classroom management software, linked on your portal. Please visit the site immediately and, if you feel it's necessary, take the tutorial to become familiar with the system.

Required texts

Lombardi, J. V. (2013). *How universities work*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
ISBN 978-1421411224

Smith, R. D. (2013). *Strategic planning for public relations*. New York: Routledge.
ISBN 978-0-415-50676-2

Other articles / chapters will be required reading and provided in PDF form on TITANium. A partial list of these items can be found at the end of this syllabus. Although some items shown are books, you will not be assigned any single supplemental item that's longer than one chapter.

Attendance

Attendance in class is a university expectation, as noted in the university catalog. You may miss up to 20% of the total (three class sessions) for any reason *with no penalty*. No notes or absence excuses are required. However, at four absences, the highest final grade you may earn is a B, regardless of academic performance. There are no exceptions. Attendance is verified through a roll sheet passed around in class. You must sign the sheet to verify attendance.

Academic preparation

As Winston Churchill said, *"There is no substitute for hard work."* Indeed, CSUF recommends that you spend 25 to 35 hours a week in study if you are a full-time college student:

<http://calstate.fullerton.edu/news/inside/2007/25-35Campaign.html>

In this class, students work as a community of scholars. You alone are responsible for your academic preparation – including communication with me and with others in class.

The Student Support Services page has a lot of helpful information:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/aac/SSA/index.asp>

Assignment submissions

All assignments will be submitted via e-mail as Word documents unless otherwise noted in the specific instructions provided. An assignment evaluation guide has also been provided, so you will be able to understand the performance expectations. Read it carefully, along with the document called Common Copy Errors.

Late assignments are not welcomed in this class. The first late assignment will be penalized 30%; beyond that, no further assignments will be accepted late.

Assignments

There are 1,000 points possible in this class. See the course calendar for deadlines. Some assignments for undergraduates and graduate students differ, as indicated.

- **Discussion and interaction** (100 points)
We will have regular online discussion questions to frame our subsequent discussion in class. A posted response from each student is expected, along with engagement in the in-class discussion. As a result of this interaction, the instructor will award a point score at the end of the semester, is at the instructor's discretion, reflecting student involvement in the discussion.
- **Application papers** (4 @ 100 points each)
Select a current 'real-world' situation that presents a challenge to higher education institutions and/ or stakeholders. Explain the situation and apply public relations concepts to either critique the response that has been made, or propose a new or different response. Follow this guideline in the construction of the paper:
 - Summarize the situation and briefly describe its history, development, etc.
 - Identify and briefly describe how PR strategies should be applied.
 - Explain how conflict will be resolved through PR action.
 - Support with at least three sources. One source is a news article describing the situation. The remaining sources must be peer-reviewed or professional literature that supports the resolution.
 - List all sources with in-text references and an ending reference list (APA format).
 - The application paper should be typed (line spacing 1.5); 4 pages maximum.

- **Weebly electronic portfolio** (1 @ 100 points)

Create an electronic portfolio on Weebly to display samples of work completed for this class, and any other academic or professional work relevant to 'tell your story' as a future professional communicator. The portfolio will be structured as a showcase of talent for potential employers. The portfolio should include a one-page resume as well as some reflection that addresses some or all of the questions below in a thoughtful way. (More details on this assignment will be forthcoming).

- What have you learned from this class about public relations and higher education?
- How is what you're learning helping you to achieve academic and professional goals?
- What have you discovered about yourself since beginning undergraduate study?

- **Term Project for Undergraduate Students – Social media project** (1 @ 200 points)

Undergraduate students will work in teams of two or three students to develop a social media project. The project will creatively explain the relevant application of public relations strategy, tactics, and tools to address a challenge currently faced by U.S. higher education. This can be a website, podcast, or YouTube video. Create a work that's engaging, accurate, relevant, and creative. It's ok to include other people from outside the class in the production. If creating a podcast or YouTube video, limit content to 8-12 minutes. *See instructor to discuss your options.*

- **Midterm** (1 @ 100 points)

- **Final Exam** (1 @ 100 points)

- **Term Project for Graduate Students – Position Paper** (1 @ 200 additional points, grad only)

Graduate students will individually write a paper that takes a position on a change that needs to be made in higher education. This change can be specific and local (e.g., a change at our university) or more general and conceptual (e.g., a change in values of American higher education). Present arguments for the change, and evidence in support of it. Discuss how strategic public relations action could bring about this change. Clearly identify the strategic and tactical elements needed. Suggest a means of implementing the change that will either directly or indirectly improve the gathering and dissemination of knowledge or improvement of the 'college experience' for students. This is an opportunity to take a position on an issue of contemporary concern, defend that position in writing using logical and emotional reasoning, and link the change to effective use of strategic public relations practices. [Paper should be 8-10 pages, typed/ double spaced, APA format, with at least 8 reliable academic or professional publication references. Graduate student papers will be submitted to the instructor *and* made available on TITANIUM for the entire class to read and learn from.] *See instructor to discuss your options.*

Grading

Grades in this class are earned, and based completely on points, with the exception of the absence penalty noted above. ***There is no curve or other 'formula' involved. There is no extra credit.*** Your final grade will be based on the number of points you earn during the term. There are 1,000 points possible in this class, as shown below. *Graduate students must complete the additional paper as noted above.

	Percentage of total points (approx.)	Total points earned	Final letter grade	(GPA)
Superior attainment of course objectives	Greater than 93%	930 to 1,000	A	4.0
Superior attainment of course objectives	90 – 92.9%	900 to 929	A-	3.7
Good attainment of course objectives	87 – 89.9%	870 to 899	B+	3.3
Good attainment of course objectives	83 – 86.9%	830 to 869	B	3.0
Good attainment of course objectives	80 – 82.9%	800 to 829	B-	2.7
Good attainment of course objectives	77 – 79.9%	770 to 799	C+	2.3
Good attainment of course objectives	73 – 76.9%	730 to 769	C	2.0
Acceptable attainment of course objectives	70 – 72.9%	700 to 729	C-	1.7
If you're in danger of a final grade lower than C-, I'll recommend you drop the class.				

Grades are kept in TITANium, and this method has proven to be very reliable. However, in the event of a discrepancy, it is important for you to have accurate records. Save a copy of everything you submit for this class. Please save a copy of all graded papers I return to you. On the last class day before the final exam, the assignment grades entered for you in the grade book will be considered to be correct unless you notify me at that point.

Classroom management issues

- ***Disruptive behavior is unacceptable.*** Class will begin on time, and you will arrive on time. If you repeatedly show up late, we will need to have an unpleasant discussion.
- ***One person speaks at a time.*** I enjoy a healthy discussion. I have the floor, and will surrender it one person at a time. When somebody speaks, everybody else listens.
- ***No cell phone use in class.*** No rings, no calls, no text, no Twitter, no exceptions.
- ***Follow the university's policies regarding food and drink.*** Enjoy your meal before you come to class, please. There is a posted policy about food and drink, and we will adhere to it.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations prohibit me from discussing your academic performance or grades with others, or in a class forum. I cannot legally return your graded papers to a third party. To discuss specific issues about your work, contact me via e-mail.

Accommodations

CSU-Fullerton is committed to providing equal access to university programs and services for all students. Under university policies and federal and state law, students with documented disabilities are entitled to “reasonable accommodations” to ensure an equal opportunity for class performance. If you have a disability, or think you may have one, please contact the Office of Disability Support Services <http://www.fullerton.edu/DSS/>.

I will work with you on accommodations, but you must first register with DSS. No retroactive accommodations will be made. In other words, if you wait till mid-semester to register with DSS, you cannot go back and retroactively get accommodations on work already completed.

Emergency preparedness

The safety of all students attending California State University Fullerton is of paramount importance. During an emergency, you need a basic understanding of your personal responsibilities and the University’s emergency response procedures.

In the event of an emergency, please adhere to the guidelines outlined on the CSUF Web site at <http://prepare.fullerton.edu/>.

Academic honesty

It is unacceptable for students to turn in work which appears to me to be copied, either all or in part, from another original source. Because plagiarism is a serious concern in academe, I do electronic searches to verify the originality of content and the accuracy of reported sources. Do not plagiarize. If in doubt about sourcing, ask. Plagiarized papers do not earn credit in this class and may require filing of a report of academic dishonesty with the university. Let’s not go there.

Instead, go here! → The CSUF Academic Integrity page: <http://www.fullerton.edu/integrity/>

Course calendar

Week	Topic	Readings/ chapters (Article readings TBA)	Assignment due
1	Class introduction		
2	What does it mean to be an educated, critical thinker?	Smith, Introduction	
3	What is the value of scholarly inquiry?	Lombardi, Ch. 1, 4	Application paper #1
4	What are the realities of higher education's 'scholarly tribe'?	Lombardi, Ch. 2, 3	
5	What are the realities of the PR profession?	Smith, Step 1	Application paper #2
6	How do we make PR theory relevant in the context of higher education?	Lombardi, Ch. 5, 6, 7	
7	What's the value of an organizational framework?	Smith, Step 2	
8	Midterm Exam		
9	Organizational issues in higher education	Lombardi, Ch. 8, 9, 10, 14	
10	How do we examine interpersonal relationship issues in higher education?	Lombardi, Ch. 11, 12 Smith, Step 3	Application paper #3
11	How do we examine media communication issues in/ about higher education?	Smith, Step 4	
12	How do we merge theory and practice?	Smith, Step 5	Application paper #4
13	How does public relations support integrity within higher education?	Lombardi, Ch. 14	
14	What does the future hold for higher education?	Lombardi, Ch. 15	Application paper #8
15	Present and discuss social media projects		Social media project Graduate papers
16	Final Exam		Weebly portfolio

Supplemental readings to be posted in TITANium

- Becher, T. (1989). *Academic tribes and territories*. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1990). *Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163-176.
- Crawford, E. C., Fudge, J., Hubbard, G. T., & Filak, V. F. (2013). The mass comm type: Student personality traits, motivations, and the choice between news and strategic communication majors. *Journalism & Mass Communication Editor*, 68(2), 104-118.
- Gudykunst, W., & Shapiro, R. B. (1996). Communication in everyday interpersonal and intergroup encounters. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 20(1), 19-45.
- Hays, B., & Swanson, D. J. (2011, Fall). Prevalence and success of reverse mentoring in public relations. *Public Relations Journal*, 5, 4. Available at:
<http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/PRJournal/Documents/2011HaysSwanson.pdf>
- Jiang, H. , & Shen, H. (2013). Toward a theory of public relations practitioners' own conflict: Work versus life. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 25(3), 259-279.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.) (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: Implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. American College Personnel Association. Retrieved from:
<http://www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/LearningReconsidered2.pdf>
- Severin, W. J. & Tankard, J. W. (2001). *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Sykes, C. J. (1988). *Profscam: Professors and the demise of higher education*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Swanson, D. J. (2006). Academic advising of undergraduates in communication: Structural models and service challenges identified by faculty. *Ohio Communication Journal*, 44, 99-108. Available from:
<http://works.bepress.com/dswanson/47>
- Tagg, J. (2003). *The learning paradigm college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Todd, V. (2009). PRSSA faulty and professional advisors' perceptions of public relations curriculum, assessment of students' learning, and faculty performance. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 64(1), 71-90.
- Wheatley, M. with Frieze, D. (2010). *Leadership in the age of complexity: From hero to host*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/Leadership-in-Age-of-Complexity.pdf>