

## Podcasting PR's Role in Social Movements

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**Overview:** From the Suffrage Movement to #MeToo, and from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter, public relations has played a major role advancing social movements throughout history. In this scaffolded assignment, students in an asynchronous online PR & Social Movements honors course created podcasts about the role of public relations in social movements. Through a series of group assignments, students research key communicators of the movement, craft a script, record a podcast, and design cover art. Once complete, they share their work more broadly by creating an abstract and poster to present with their podcast at student research day.

Through independent research, students identify ways that strategic communication has been used to persuade, motivate, and change attitudes in an effort to advance social movements and activist causes. The Suffrage Movement was the primary movement used when this assignment was initially deployed; however, it can be used to cover a variety of social movements and is replicable across a variety of levels and types of public relations courses.

As professors seek out ways to incorporate topics of diversity, equity and inclusion into their public relations courses, this assignment provides a way to add a range of diverse voices to the discussion. As The

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Commission on Public Relations Education's *Report on Undergraduate Education, Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners* (2018) notes, diversity and inclusion is a key area of emphasis and recommended that educators "commit to integrating D&I focused topics and discussions in the curriculum" (p. 139).

Additionally, as many professors continue to teach online courses, and while "students in online courses can feel a strong sense of isolation and lack of inclusivity" (Guertin, 2010), this assignment attempts to combat that by providing an opportunity to connect with peers and build community. Lee (2008) and colleagues note that collaborative development of podcasts enables "student conceptualisations of disciplinary content to be shared with peers," and "is a powerful way of stimulating both individual and collective learning" (p. 501).

Given the rise of podcasting as a broadcast medium and its ability to engage broader audiences, it is a valuable tool for scholarship (Singer, 2019) as well as public relations practitioners. This assignment presents a more "creative" use of podcasting in the classroom, according to Heilesen (2010), who noted that "creative use generally means assigning students to communicate by means of podcasts their understanding of a particular topic" (p. 1066). This is in contrast to the professor creating podcasts to deliver course content to students.

Finally, this assignment provides professors and students with an opportunity to share their work, and the stories of lesser-known activist communicators, outside of the classroom. Through participation in Student Research Day, students shared their research and findings via posters accompanied by iPads so participants can listen to the podcasts while reviewing the poster. There is also the possibility to partner with campus

media outlets to further disseminate the student-created podcast content.

**Student Learning Goals:**

- Understand the role of strategic communication in social movements.
- Understand the importance of communicating for a specific audience with an objective in mind.
- Identify examples of public relations strategies and tactics in social movements, politics, and/or corporate public relations campaigns.

**Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes:**

(A small sample of responses notably from non-majors as this was taught in an honors core course.)

- *“I definitely learned a lot more about Elizabeth Cady Stanton and how she used PR tactics. My favorite part was doing the research about her.”*
- *“I liked working with a group and this was an assignment unlike any that I’ve had so it was fun and different.”*

**Connection to Public Relations Practice/Theory:**

In the early 2000s, scholars like Dozier and Lauzen (2000), Smith and Ferguson (2001), and Berger (2005) called for more scholarship related to social activism. In addition, Miller (2000) called on scholars to examine “civic, voluntary, and religious groups; labor unions, consumer groups, and trade associations; women’s and minority groups; small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and political groups” (p. 414).

Twenty years later, as research and pedagogy related to the role of public relations, social activism and social movements have grown, the emphasis in textbooks still often remains on public relations in a corporate context.

Given the increased attention to social movements in the 21st century, as well as renewed student interest in participating in activism, this assignment provides a timely way to examine the role of public relations through a lens other than corporate PR. It also provides an opportunity to infuse topics and theories related to diversity, equity and inclusion into the public relations classroom.

### References

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## Appendix

**Podcast Assignment: Students are placed in groups of four to five, with each group assigned a social movement.** Students first work individually and then collaboratively on five smaller assignments, as follows:

**1. Secondary research report (individual assignment):** Directions:

In order to begin what will eventually become a podcast, you'll need to have identified and reviewed extensive research related to the movement and key communicator you're investigating. This assignment asks you to identify at least 20 sources of secondary research. Your sources must include all of the following:

- Historical newspaper articles
- Historical research from government sources (ex: The Library of Congress)
- Scholarly research like peer reviewed journal articles

- An interview with a historian (can be print, audio or visual)

**2. Abstract draft (individual assignment):** Now that you have conducted ample research, summarize your findings and prepare for the creation of your podcast. In no more than 300 words, write a preliminary abstract that summarizes your findings. Imagine that your podcast is complete and you're writing the abstract to describe your podcast.

Questions you might answer in your abstract:

- What is the podcast about?
- What are you trying to prove or disprove?
- What is the connection between this person, the movement and public relations?
- Why does this person matter?
- What is the long-term impact of this person's communication work?

You will revise your abstract. This is not the final version, but it's a starting point for you. Once you finalize your podcast, you'll develop the final abstract to reflect the final content in your podcast.

**3. Podcast script:** As a group, you will write the script for a 10-15 minute podcast (about 2,000+ words).

Requirements:

- All members of the group must speak in the podcast so they all must be written into the script.
- You must craft a sponsor message. Here is a simple sponsor message template: "[Your podcast name] is sponsored by [the name of your department] at [the name of your college or university]. For more information, visit [departmental website]."

Important Notes:

- Name your podcast!
- Consider what you want your podcast episode to convey. Think about the theme or the ideas that you most want to share. Craft your script with an objective in mind. What do you want people to learn or remember?
- Use storytelling in your podcast. Make it a good story!
- You may want to consider the “did you know” or “undiscovered” angles – what did you find out that you think many people may not know about?
- Write a script that you would want to listen to! What can you do to make it interesting, fun, unique or entertaining? Have fun with it.
- Bottom line: your podcast should not be dull, and you should not simply read the biographies of the people you’re highlighting.
- Remember that this podcast should cover public relations and the social movement you’ve chosen. Keep the focus on the ways that communication was used to achieve an objective in the movement, and the communication strategies and tactics utilized by the people you are highlighting in your podcast.
- Discuss topics like:
  - The communication strategies and tactics used to achieve a specific objective
  - The intended audience of a message
  - The ways that targeted audiences were communicated with, when and why
  - Consider the role of the speaker
  - Consider the channels used to distribute communication
  - Consider the role of the media. How was media used to convey messages of the movement? What media? Where?

When? Why?

- Consider the role of influence, public opinion and perception.

How were attitudes or behaviors changed as a result of this person's work?

- Did the communicator achieve her objective? How? Why/why not?

What was the impact of the communication?

Use the information in this link for help in crafting your podcast script:

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/blog/write-podcast-script-examples>

**4. Podcast recording:** Now that you've crafted your podcast script, you will record your podcast! As a group, you will produce one 10-15-minute podcast that covers public relations and a social movement, keeping the focus on the ways that communication was used to achieve an objective in the movement, and the communication strategies and tactics utilized by the specific communicators of the movement.

Requirements:

- As a group, you will produce one 10-15-minute podcast.
- Your podcast must have a name.
- All members of your group must be introduced and must speak in the podcast.
- Your podcast should cover public relations and your chosen social movement. Keep the focus on the ways that communication was used to achieve an objective in the movement, and the communication strategies and tactics utilized by the people you are highlighting in your podcast.

Helpful tips:

- Use the information in this link for help in all things with



your podcast! It has a ton of great information: <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/30/662070097/starting-your-podcast-a-guide-for-students#toolbox>

- You may also want to watch this video about writing for the ear: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeeoGr2Ru60>
- You can use any app that you choose to record the podcast. If you have a Mac, you should have GarageBand. There's also Audacity, which is a free audio editing app. There are tons more. Totally up to your group.

Note: It's ok if you deviate from your initial script a bit, especially after watching the video about writing for the ear, above. Focus on telling an accurate, interesting story in a way that will hold your listeners' attention.

Assignment submission: Due to the size of your audio file, please upload the file to your Google Drive and then share the link to the file with me via our course site.

**5. Podcast visuals – Cover Art (group assignment):** Finally, now that your podcast is complete, you will make a podcast cover image to entice listeners. This is the visual preview of your podcast and it should capture the subject and tone of your podcast. You will make one cover image for your podcast.

Using Canva's free templates for different genres, create your podcast cover art: <https://www.canva.com/podcast-covers/templates/>

Important Notes to consider when designing your cover art:

- What is the podcast about?
- What images will entice listeners?
- What fonts will convey your message appropriately?
- What colors are most appropriate?

For additional information about creating podcast artwork, search for content from Apple music and/or Buzzsprout (a podcast hosting site).

### **6. Podcast Poster (Group Assignment)**

For this assignment, you will produce a poster for presentation at the upcoming Student Research Day that highlights the research and creation of your podcast. This is a group project to be completed with your podcast group, and only one poster is needed per group. You will create a physical, printed poster.

You will use your podcast as the basis of your poster, which means the person or people you researched becomes your primary “case” for analysis in the poster. When you present at the symposium, you will present your poster and bring along your iPads so that participants can listen to your podcast as well.

Best Practices for Design: I suggest using Canva to create your poster. Posters should be created in landscape format (imagine a PowerPoint slide). For additional information about best practices in creating academic posters, visit your library or office of undergraduate research.

Your poster must include the following:

- A title
- An analysis of the ways that public relations strategies and

tactics were used in your topic. Highlight topics and sub-topics that you think are noteworthy.

- Your eventual podcast name and visual cover art that you created.
- Key Takeaways. What did you learn about public relations and social movements?
- Use images, tables, graphs, charts, etc., to communicate as appropriate.