Course Purpose

The purpose of this class is to convey communication and public relations fundamentals and the use of media for publicity purposes. You will prepare basic segments of a communication plan—news release, fact sheets, visuals, audience research, etc.—and learn how to present these components across both traditional and online platforms. Through these assignments, you will hone your writing and visual communication skills while participating in a class blog with updated links on the latest happenings regarding the class.

Course Overview

You should view the class as an introduction to integrated media used in all manner of industries, including communication agencies; farm, factory and/or professional organizations; trade show promotions; event planning; non-profit and/or socio-economic/political advocacy; or outsourced and home office entrepreneurial ventures. The role of the instructor will vary throughout the class as facilitator, consultant or even client. That role will be expressed interpersonally in class or during office hours and digitally in a class blog operated by the instructor keeping everyone abreast of deadlines and otherwise helping you complete assignments.

This may seem like a different kind of class, especially if you are in a non-professional major relying on the professor to guide and review you in readings and exams. The Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication is one of the premier and oldest accredited programs in the country. Our standards here are high.

To succeed in this class it is necessary to shift your focus from being a “student” to being a working professional. Even though you may not be a journalism or advertising major, you will learn basics of publicity methods in the same manner that majors learn:

- Understanding the history of traditional and new media.
- Learning about the audience of each platform and how to address them.
- Assembling components of a media plan and revising those components in a final project.
- Presenting that plan to a group.
- Comprehending the legal, ethical and professional values and principles to which media practitioners are held.

Learning Outcomes

If you successfully fulfill requirements for this class, you will learn:

1. The fundamentals of public relations as practiced in industry.
2. The importance of theory and research in effective communication.
3. Integration of media platforms.
4. Appreciation for interpersonal as well as human-computer interaction.
5. Basic understanding of journalism and communication fundamentals (communication skills, audience development, law and ethics).
6. Use of popular technologies in professional ways.
Class Methodologies

Online Learning

Interacting with others and the instructor in the class blog constitutes part of your classroom participation grade. By utilizing this resource, you will learn about content associated with the class in addition to enhancing your own blogging abilities—all the while being reminded about the importance of deadlines, time management and organizational skills.

Collaborative Learning

Although each of you will be responsible for his or her own assignments and final project, we will devote a portion of classroom time to small-group discussions to foster collaborative learning. During these sessions you should feel free to consult with classmates about any aspect of publicity or class-related content. For instance, you can brainstorm for ideas, ask about databanks or other resources, request or provide help with writing, editing, design, artwork, blogging or any other aspect of integrated media. During these sessions, the instructor will visit with each group and provide additional counsel.

Traditional Learning

Traditional learning involves lectures, guest visits, readings and examinations. A midterm will be based on such learning covering principles and fundamentals of publicity methods.

Presentation Learning

The basics of publicity include more than knowledge of platforms; they also involve presentations and interpersonal discussions. As such, the class will be divided into six groups. You won’t be working with others in these groups; they are assembled alphabetically for organizational reasons. Following the midterm, we will devote a portion of each week for members of each group to present the basics of their final project and how they envision it serving a client or publicizing a theme. One student may decide to do a non-profit blog, another a home office blog, or still another an association one. Through presentation, you will learn about all these venues from other students who have benefited from online, collaborative and traditional learning methodologies above.

Textbooks


Class Assignments and Grading Scale

1. You will produce four assignments for your chosen client: a) an audience, membership or target-market profile; b) a news release, c) a fact sheet on the select theme, d) artwork and/or other visuals. Each assignment is worth 100 points.
2. A midterm worth 200 points based on lectures, readings and guest speakers.
3. A final project worth 300 points based on assembling components in #1 above into a professional blog with updated links, formatting and other online attributes.
4. Classroom participation: 100 points.

Other Information:

**Attendance, Absence and Assignment Policy:** Attendance is particularly important in a class such as this in which concepts are introduced, debated and analyzed. By not attending, you will quickly get behind. Because each assignment is based on the previous assignment, getting behind will seriously impact your grade in this class.

If you are required to miss a class, because of athletics or other scheduled event, simply write a brief e-mail to me explaining the reason for the absence **during the first two weeks of class.**

Deadlines are crucial when working with the media and all deadlines will be firm in this class. **Missing an exam, assignment or project deadline will result in zero points.** Each assignment deadline will be at least a week in length so plan accordingly. If extreme circumstances arise, notify me before the deadline or within 24 hours and appropriate accommodations will be made. No make-up will be provided if you fail to notify me or if the excuse does not qualify.

**Academic Integrity:** All work must be your own. Any form of plagiarism is illegal and will result in a zero and possible expulsion from the class. Offenders will also be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students as outlined in the student handbook. Always cite and attribute any information you take from others.

**Accuracy:** Public relations practitioners rely on credibility and credibility relies on accuracy. Each fact error, such as misspellings of proper nouns, incorrect dates or weak sentence structure that could be interpreted erroneously will result in a 10% drop in the grade of that assignment. Note that multiple fact errors may exist in a single assignment.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities are invited to discuss special needs with me by contacting me via telephone or email to schedule a meeting that's convenient for both parties. Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable and necessary academic accommodations if determined eligible by the appropriate disability services staff at their home institution. Prior to granting disability accommodations in this course, the instructor must receive written verification of a student's eligibility for specific accommodations from the disability services staff at the home institution. It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with their home institution's disability services staff and to follow the established procedures for having the accommodation notice sent to the instructor. Depending on the disability, the instructor may alter participation and/or other classroom requirements.

**Respect:** This class will show respect and not discriminate. Please inform me if anyone in class appears to violate this policy. You may also contact the Department Director, Dr. Michael Bugeja.

**Class Etiquette and Rules:** No computers, phones or other electronic devices are allowed during class. This is a journalism school and students are trained to listen and to take notes with a pen or pencil. The urge to browse with a laptop or text with a phone is too distracting; many professors no longer allow the use of these devices in class, for good reason.

You may not read unrelated material during class time, including the Daily or material for another class. Also, unauthorized use of electronic devices during class time such as browsing the Internet, engaging in online shopping or chat, texting, reading email, using cell phones, etc., will result in the lowering of your participation grade.
APPENDIX

Note: These are traditional components of a professional media plan and are provided here for guidance. Some assignments will be based on these precepts. We will go over these facets in the first few sessions of class so that you have a feel for the standards and contents of professional communication plans and campaigns.

I. Audience/Membership Profile

A. Communication Audit (form of research examining the organization’s communication goals and then checking to see how well the current communication program achieves stated goals).

A communication audit should answer five questions:

1. What are the client’s goals in relation to stakeholders, constituents or audience?
2. What communication activities has the organization used to fulfill those goals?
3. Which communication activities are working well toward the achievement of those goals?
4. Which communication activities are not working well or are missing from the client’s plan to achieve those goals?
5. Given the findings of the audit, what revisions in goals or communication activities are recommended for a new campaign?

B. Issue Management (a process of analyzing emerging trends and issues associated with the client’s business).

Part I: Analyzing trends and issues. What trends or issues can help the client expand into new markets or circumvent problems associated with those markets? For instance, if the client is a grocer in Ames, he or she may not understand that demand for organic produce is growing here. The team can research this emerging trend and provide data for use in an advertisement, poster or blog. If the client is relying on delivery of organic produce from distant markets, the team can research how other businesses selling organic produce are coping with the rising price of fuel costs in transportation?

Part II: Devising an action plan. How can communication help the client take advantage of trends or circumvent problems? For instance, the client can showcase organic produce in newspaper advertisements containing coupons. As for the higher cost of fuel for trucks bringing organic produce to market, has the client considered a video of testimonials from people willing to pay higher prices for produce if they are free from contaminants? What issues/problems are you trying to tackle? Among whom?

C. Evaluative Research. This section of a research report outlines procedures to determine the success of a public relations plan. For instance, in the case of the above grocer expanding his or her business with organic foods, sales of such produce can be evaluated before and after publication of the newspaper advertisement. Sales of specific organic foods showcased in the video about contaminant-free foods also can be measured before and after airing of testimonials.

You job is to evaluate the research from the other groups and provide additional evaluative research (focus group, feedback research, surveys, secondary (library) so a reasonably accurate snapshot of reality is provided to a client. Clients want to know the issues and attitudes that surround their business and how you plan to measure campaign effectiveness.

D. Communication Plan Report. A professional communication report designed for the client. The report will be visually designed and include illustrations, graphics, photographs, logos and a professional layout that enhances readability, recognition and reader understanding. The other group’s professionally written communication plan summaries will be turned over to the writing and visual communication group on a specific date so a final plan report is ready for the client during midterm week.
II Campaign Planning

Once the reports on communication, issues/trends, actions and evaluation methods are determined and a final research report is completed, the client’s campaign plan can begin to take form. The client may make recommendations after reading the report and these recommendations will be included in the final campaign plan. The campaign plan should contain four main elements:

1. **A main goal**, or a concise easily understood general statement such as “expanding into the organic produce market.”
2. **Secondary objectives**, or longer statements supported by one or two paragraphs that expand upon the main goal and other related goals, such as “introducing healthier lifestyles for local residents” and “making residents aware of the benefits of contaminant-free produce.”
3. **Strategies**, or detailed descriptions of the kinds of actions (tactics) the plan requires to fulfill the client’s main goal and secondary objectives. Example:

   - **Strategy #1: Word of mouth marketing.**
     
     Seek face-to-face opportunities at farmers markets or county fairs to demonstrate how contaminant-free foods enhance health with contests for best produce or cook-offs using organic foods. Give taste tests at public gatherings such as a football tailgate and document that with video for testimonials.

   - **Strategy #2: Information about trends and issues**
     
     Create blogs for an expert to address consumer questions about organic food and build the market base locally. Produce news releases and streaming video to publicize events in Strategy #1. Create print ad that not only contain discounts but also recipes and/or factoids about healthier lifestyles.

III. Campaign Implementation

While the various agencies provide different materials based on the client and his or her needs, here are some components typically appearing in a comprehensive campaign:

- Main goal and secondary objectives.
- Evidence of strategic planning that reflects how to achieve objectives.
- Data that reflect the clients needs.
- Analysis of the client’s customers, products, services or audiences.
- Evidence of the client’s current communications efforts and how to enhance them.
- Internal and external research associated with goals, objectives, customers, products, services or audiences.
- Analysis of the most current and pressing issues and trends and bibliographic evidence of that in the appendix of the communication plan.
- Excellent writing and visual presentation of that plan.
- Proper citation or documentation.
- Useful findings, recommendations, strategies and tactics for the publicity campaign and measures to weigh their effectiveness.

**Strategies for Successful Plans and Campaigns**

Note: The following strategies provide additional details that may help inform you about fundamental principles and components of communication plans and publicity campaigns.
I. Common Communication Tactics in Campaigns across Media Platforms

To help you envision the communication plan and publicity campaign, I have outlined briefly below use of social, interpersonal, mediated and news methods often created or utilized by communication agencies on behalf of their clients.

1. Use of Social Media

Blogs, wikis, content communities, social networks, podcast, video casts, public service announcements.

2. Use of Interpersonal or Mediated Methods

Face-to-face meetings, newsletters, magazines, videos, bulletin boards, speeches, intranets, e-mail, instant messaging, special events, Web sites, reports, conference calls, cell phone text messaging, open house and tours, special events, donations and volunteering materials, sponsorship of outreach at public or private events, marketing, brochures, posters, fliers, informational DVD and CD.

3. Use of News Media

News releases, media kit, fact sheets, backgrounders, photo opportunities, photo opportunity sheets, photographs with cut-lines, media advisors, pitches (letters, e-mail and telephone), video news releases, news conferences, public service announcements, guest editorial and commentaries, letters to the editor, interviews, video media tours, video news coverage, broadcast releases, broadcast news coverage and actualities for stations and Web sites, pitches, stories for trade or association magazines.

II. Interviewing and Information-Gathering Procedures

1. Gather information from real sources involved in some way with what you are studying. Interview sources either face-to-face, by phone or conduct an e-mail interview. Identifying information (name, title, and phone number, e-mail address, transcript and or notes) must be included in the communication plan.

2. Study, synopsize and print out the client’s Web page and links. If your client does not have a Web page, identify and synopsize the online sites of competitors or even sites that the client frequents.

3. Study and list Web pages that the client’s audience or customers would likely visit.

4. Use Lexis-Nexis and another database to research your issues and trends associated with the client’s business or organization.

5. Accumulate information about your client’s organization, its personnel and ongoing activities. Determine the demographics, psychographics and geo-demographics of your clients target audience(s).

6. Understand the daily environment and routines of your client or his or her audience. Identify suppliers (phone, fax, Web list these as well) and equipment that your audience may utilize and compile a price list of at least 10 of these products or services.

7. Write an audience survey to gather information and insight concerning your defined campaign goals and objectives.

8. Conduct a focus group to gather information and insight concerning your defined campaign goals and objective.

9. Design and write a questionnaire for your targeted audience that reflects your campaign goal and objectives.

10. Compile a bibliography of at least 5 books associated with your client and/or target audience.

11. Analyze your client’s target market. For instance, if you are conducting a campaign for a new cuisine and chef
for a local restaurant, research the lifestyle statistics of people who dine out and spend $75 or more for a sit-down dinner for two with wine. If you are conducting a campaign for a new energy efficient vehicle being sold by a car dealership in Ames, find out the household income of those able to afford such a product and why, in this area, they would be attracted to such a vehicle. If you are planning to conduct a membership drive or publicize an event by a campus group, analyze the group’s membership and other telling data that define the target audience so that you meet campaign objectives.

12. Another means of gathering information about your audience is to comb through the various types of publications and available written documents that are produced by your client/audience. Establish a profile of their likes and dislikes. Read minutes of past meetings, brochures, and bylaws and explicate newsletters and publications. If your client has a professional Web site assess the site for some of the information listed above.

III. Questions to Ask about the Effectiveness of the Plan and Campaign

- Is it what we are looking for by way of content, platforms, visual appeal, presentation?
- Do the plan and campaign reflect the client’s or organization’s purpose?
- Does the plan identify and solve problem(s) or stated objectives? (Backgrounders, history or other info must be included to understand the problem or issue.)
- Is the campaign practical and affordable? (Provide a budget and plan assessment.
- Does the campaign plan appear workable? Does it take into account our resources, power structure, existing decision-making processes and culture?
- Is the campaign likely to produce the results we want (knowledge, skill enhancement, donations increased membership?)
- Have you incorporated an effective and cost-effective media plan and a media budget?
- Do you feel comfortable that you have the skills to executive the plan in a campaign?
- Does you plan and campaign include such elements as news stories, advertisements, public service announcements, broadcast copy, online materials and even a crisis management plan if something goes wrong?
- Are you and your group dependable? Have you worked well with members of other groups and established effective communication and collaboration?
- Are you interactions with the instructor, client and classmates professional and helpful?

IV. Suggestions for Presentations

The ability to inform, persuade and convey credibility will determine how successful the presentation is. The client needs to retain as much information as possible. You can show visuals pictures or posters. You can make a multi-media or PowerPoint presentation. You can refer to or link to the Internet or even construct a blog, wiki or Web site. (Address the possible problems that can occur during the presentation and have a back-up plan in the wings. Remember Murphy’s Law: If something can go wrong it will.) No matter how well you speak, or do multi-media presentation, your audience will not retain all of the information you throw at them. Handouts must be included and should be designed to clarify and keep participants involved in your presentation.

An effective presentation might also include:

1. An agenda, including the names of presenters.
2. The presentation goal(s).
3. Background, when necessary on topics to be addressed in the campaign.
4. Documentation that reinforces a key point.
5. Key terms and acronyms with definitions that audience may not know.
6. Important information gleaned from your research, particularly information reflecting the client’s values and interests.
7. A skeletal, sentence outline of the presentation to facilitate note taking and to provide an understanding of the dominant message.

8. Annotated illustrations; charts, graphs, or the like.


10. Brief paragraphs, headings, and other typographical devices to promote speed-reading of pertinent text.

11. Feedback sheets for evaluating the presentation.

Other Presentation Recommendations

In addition to handouts, successful presentations utilize various types of visual illustrations. Illustrations are designed with the following points in mind:

1. Caption and annotate illustrations to help ensure common understandings and to avoid rambling explanations during a meeting. Make sure all illustrations are credited to avoid copyright infringement.

2. Pay attention to type basics. Use the same typeface and type size to denote comparable parts of an illustration to help avoid reader confusion. For example, slide titles should reveal a uniform style, point size and color throughout our presentation. Use an appropriate point size for viewing and reading. Handout type size should not be smaller than 12 point. The size of type used in visual presentations needs to be no smaller that 26-point.

3. Pay attention to typography. Use no more than two families of types. Avoid using upper caps in titles.

4. Use graphs, photographs, illustrations, color and basic design principles for visual impact.

5. Include visuals of your media campaign in your presentation.

6. Simple is better. Strip away everything visually that does not contribute to your overall message and presentation mood.

Final thoughts: A professional presentation should address the needs of the client. Present your best ideas in a persuasive and informational manner as to how your client can address their needs and/or solve their problems.