Course: PRAD 562 • Section 201 • Winter 2015

**Media Relations**

Class Time: Wed. 5:45 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Classroom: 14 E. Jackson (Daley building), Room 1230

**Professor: Dr. Matt Ragas, Ph.D.**
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Office Phone: (312) 362-6003
Mobile: (407) 963-8763 *(voice only, no texts please)*
Office Hours: Tues. & Wed. 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. and by appointment

**Course Description:**

The Media Relations graduate seminar is designed to facilitate a detailed understanding of the theory and practice of media relations, a core function of the public relations profession. Through a mix of readings and discussions, assignments, guest speakers, and a team final report/presentation, students will gain a strong foundation in the fundamentals of media relations. By developing a targeted media relations plan for a product line of Discover Financial Services (NYSE: DFS), a local $30 billion market value FORTUNE 500 company, students will gain practical experience articulating media goals and objectives; conducting an analysis of media coverage using news databases to familiarize themselves with the client; identifying and/or developing a newsworthy idea to anchor a campaign around; developing a media list (and justifying the influencers targeted) using the Gorkana media contact database; and building influencer dossiers and a Q&A guide using social media tools and a media database. The final project entails building a media relations briefing book, including a pitch list and influencer dossiers with key message points, personalized pitch e-mails for influencers, recommendations related to the implementation of the campaign idea(s)/focus and relevant evaluation metrics.

This class was developed with generous feedback and support from various industry professionals and organizations. The professor especially wishes to thank the corporate communications department at Discover, the “client” for this class, the New York office of Gorkana Group, and Joe Poulos of Edelman corporate affairs.

**Course Objectives:**

- To provide an overview of the theory and research behind the practice of modern media relations.
- To gain an understanding that the practice of modern media relations is strategic, purposive, and research-driven. The pitch and the interview remain essential, but are just one part of a larger process.
- To examine how the practice of media relations is changing with the growth of social media, citizen journalism, shrinking newsrooms, and fragmented audiences through interaction with guest speakers.
- To practice developing and applying media relations strategies and tactics by completing assignments towards developing a media relations briefing book based on a real-world situation and top client.
- To enhance presentation and writing skills in communicating persuasively, clearly, and successfully.

**Required Reading Materials:**

There is no required textbook for the course. Due to the dynamic and changing nature of the practice of media relations, arguably no one book is comprehensive and current enough to be worth the investment for this course.
Instead, this course is based on a selection of weekly readings drawn from industry and academic sources. All readings are available in PDF form or via the Web through the course’s section on Desire2Learn (D2L). Additional readings may be posted as we progress through the quarter. **It is your responsibility to read the assigned readings and come prepared to discuss them in class on the evening they have been assigned.**

**Course Evaluation:**

The evaluation of the coursework will be based on the student’s performance in eight areas, each which constitute a portion of the final grade. These areas include: 1) individual blog assignment (post to the class blog related to media relations and making a brief presentation), 2) class attendance and participation, 3) weekly #PRAD562 tweet about media relations, 4) media goal and objectives memo, 5) media coverage analysis assignment, 6) media list builder assignment, 7) journalist dossier and Q&A guide assignment, and 8) the media relations plan presentation and briefing book (written report) due the final week of class (team-based).

The following provides a point allocation for each of these areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Blog Post and Mini-Presentation (Individual Work)</td>
<td>(outline below)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Attendance/Participation (Individual Work)</td>
<td>(outline below)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Tweeting Media Relations (Individual Work)</td>
<td>(outline below)</td>
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<td>4) Media Goals and Objectives Memo (Individual Work)</td>
<td>(outline below)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>5) Media Coverage Analysis Assignment (Team Based)</td>
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<td>6) Media List Builder Assignment (Team Based)</td>
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<td>7) Journalist Dossier/Q&amp;A Guide Assignment (Team Based)</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>8) Media Relations Briefing Book and Final Presentation (Team Based)</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>200 possible points</strong></td>
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**Course Grading Scale:**

A: 93-100%  
A-: 90-92%  
B+: 87-89%  
B: 83-86%  
B-: 80-82%  
C+: 77-79%  
C: 73-76%  
C-: 70-72%  
D: 60-69%  
F: 0-59%

**Note:** I round up partial points .5 or higher to the next whole number. For example, a 92.5 becomes a 93, while a 92.4 remains a 92. No exceptions.

**1) Class Attendance and Participation (30 points)**

As this is a learner-centered course, your attendance and active participation in class is essential. You are expected to always arrive for class on time (arriving late or leaving early is the same as being absent). Attendance will be taken each class by passing around a sign-in sheet. Email me (mragas@depaul.edu)
advance if you plan to miss a class for a work, family, or health reason and I will most likely count this as an excused absence. If I don’t hear from you in advance, I will record your absence as an unexcused absence.

You only have the potential to earn an “A” on the class attendance and participation part of your grade if you miss one class or less AND you consistently contribute to class discussion throughout the quarter. Participation is based on the quality and quantity of your contributions. IMPORTANT: It is your responsibility to sign in. If your signature isn’t on the sign-in sheet, you will be marked as absent. I will always try to remind you.

Leaving after the break without a valid excuse/notice for your absence and/or arriving to the start of class more than a few minutes late where it becomes a habit counts as an unexcused absence!

2) Blog Post and Mini-Presentation (20 points)

You will help maintain the class Tumblr blog (http://www.DePaulMediaRelations.com) which will feature summaries and critiques submitted by you and your classmates about (1) news stories relevant to media relations or (2) resources (blogs, books, websites, research reports, and online tools) that are helpful and valuable for media relations professionals. If you choose to review an online tool, website, blog, service, etc., you must demo it during your presentation. This is a great opportunity to share knowledge and information about media relations through crowd sourcing among your classmates and learning from each other. By the assigned date, you will have made your post to the class Tumblr and will make a short presentation (~5 minutes, timed) about what you have chosen to cover and share with the class. Regardless of what you select, you must provide specific and meaningful implications for the practice of media relations (i.e., I want to see/hear your opinion/analysis NOT just a summary). Part of your grade will be based on class participation and involvement so several discussion prompts should be prepared. No PowerPoint, but you will have access to the classroom computer to show visual aids, such as pulling up a website, social media pages, a short video clip, etc. Class interaction is expected. An assignment sheet will be provided.

3) Tweeting Media Relations (20 points – 2 pts. per week)

Starting with week two, each week you will be responsible for tweeting about media relations using the hashtag #PRAD562. You must use this exact hashtag on Twitter to receive credit for your tweet. You may tweet about any one of the following three topics: (1) share a headline/link to a story in the news that week directly related to media relations, (2) respond to a #PRAD562 tweet posted by one of your classmates with a thoughtful comment that helps advance class discussion or (3) respond/comment/tweet a question about one of the assigned weekly readings. I will select several tweets each week as the “top tweets.” These top tweets will earn double points for that week, meaning you can take off from submitting questions in a future week. You will receive credit in week one simply for signing up for this assignment. Tweets will be submitted and grade for nine weeks during the quarter. Please note: A student cannot earn more than a max of 20 points.

4) Media Goals and Objectives Memo (20 points)

In this initial individual assignment, you will write a short memo (maximum of 2 pages) where you briefly outline what resources (i.e., review company website, scan media coverage, watch presentation by company executives, etc.) you used to familiarize yourself with the client. You will then briefly share your assessment of the opportunities and challenges facing the client and how media relations can play a lead role in addressing one of these opportunities and challenges. Finally, you will wrap your memo by writing a Goal and several related Objectives for your proposed media relations plan. Your goal and objectives will follow best practices for goal and objective writing. Guidelines for goal and objective writing and an assignment sheet will be provided.
5) Media Coverage Analysis Assignment (20 points)

In this team assignment, your team will conduct an analysis of recent news media coverage of your client using Lexis-Nexis and other news database services. Through completing this assignment, you will gain greater familiarity with how the news media has been covering your client. You will identify and prioritize the key issues/topics/subjects and sources/third-parties (who does the media quote in their stories besides representatives of your client?) appearing in the news surrounding your client; examine which media outlets and journalists have been providing the most/least coverage; and explore how the patterns of coverage may differ across media outlets. In a final section of this assignment, you will highlight potential newsworthy ideas (resulting from your research) that a campaign could be built around. An assignment sheet will be provided.

6) Media List Builder Assignment (20 points)

Using Gorkana, a professional media contact database used widely by public relations and corporate communication professionals, your team will develop a media contact list that is appropriate for achieving the media goal and objectives you have outlined. You will restate (and potentially update) your media goal and objectives at the start of this assignment. Leveraging your prior analysis of media coverage for your client, you will justify why each influencer/media outlet was selected and why (i.e., why will this influencer/outlet and their audience be interested in your pitch? Why will they care? Do they cover this space? What do you have that’s newsworthy for them?) for each selected influencer/outlet. An emphasis will be placed on the strategic rationale underlying the choices made in building your contact list with an eye on how these selections are congruent with and advance your stated media goal and objectives. An assignment sheet will be provided.

7) Journalist Dossier and Q&A Guide Assignment (20 points)

Just as a good journalist does detailed background research on the interviewee, a good media relations person does background research on the interviewer (i.e., the journalist, blogger, or other influencer) to anticipate questions, the likely flow of the interview, and the perspective of the journalist and their media outlet. With this in mind, using publicly available information gleaned through a combination of online news databases (i.e., reviewing journalists’ past clips/coverage), websites, and social networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.), your team will build dossiers for the top two influencers on your media list. Leveraging this background research, you will also create a Q&A briefing guide to go along with the dossiers. This guide will provide your organization (and particularly its spokespeople) with insights in advance of the interview into which questions (think who, what, when, where, why) the individual may ask and the appropriate talking points in response. Again, think in terms of your stated media goal and objectives. An assignment sheet will be provided.

8) Media Relations Briefing Book (Report/Presentation) (50 points)

In this final assignment, your team will review the individual and team work completed up to this point. This final report will draw from updating work you have previously submitted, as well as adding some new sections/materials. The final project entails building a media relations briefing book, including a pitch list and influencer dossiers with key message points, personalized pitch e-mails for influencers, recommendations related to the implementation of the campaign idea(s)/focus and relevant evaluation metrics. This final assignment will include making a team presentation of this information (~20 minutes) followed by questions on the last day of class. Representatives of the client will attend the final presentations as non-grading judges. These representatives will select a “winning team” and an incentive will be awarded to the winning team. A detailed assignment sheet will be provided. Team member evaluations will factor into your final grade.

**Deadlines for Presentations and Reports**

Deadlines are real. Late work will be reduced by one letter grade for each 24 hour period it is not turned in or does not follow the stated submission format. Work turned in during the middle or end of class (this includes
making blog posts *after* the start of class!) is considered late. This pertains to both team and individual work. As you know, in a professional environment, the consequences of missing deadlines are much worse. You are responsible for meeting all assignment deadlines even if you have an excused absence from class for that week.

**IMPORTANT:** Assigned individual and team presentation dates *cannot* be made up at a later date. You will receive a zero if you miss a previously assigned presentation deadline so please plan accordingly!

**Academic Honesty**

Cheating and plagiarism (literary or artistic theft), copying someone else’s work, or other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any case of academic dishonesty will be considered grounds for an *automatic failing grade in the course*. Having someone else do your work for you is also considered academic dishonesty. University guidelines will be followed for any offenses. Please don’t put yourself in this situation.

Please refer to the Student Handbook for more details: [http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html](http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html)

**Inclusiveness**

This class encourages the free exchange of ideas. Every attempt is made to make all course material non-sexist, diverse, and multi-cultural. Should I ever fail to meet this goal, please let me know immediately.

Please be respectful of your classmates. A great way to learn is through class discussions. I love the exchange of ideas. It’s fine to disagree, but it’s important that everyone stays respectful and civil to differing viewpoints.

**Teamwork**

As with most fields, the practice of media relations and public relations is often a team sport. Even when I do work as a solo consultant, I still ultimately work in a team, as I must successfully collaborate with an organization’s communication department, management, other service providers, etc. For each team assignment in this class, you will have the opportunity to evaluate your teammates, thereby providing an added incentive for everyone on the team to carry their load. Contact me if you experience issues collaborating within a team.

**The Writing Center**

Consider visiting the Writing Center to discuss your written assignments for this course. Writing Center Tutors are specially trained undergraduate and graduate students who can help you at any stage of your writing project. They can help you focus and develop your ideas, review your drafts, and polish your writing, as well as answer questions about grammar, mechanics, style, and citation.

You may schedule appointments on an as-needed or weekly basis. In addition to Face-to-Face appointments, the Writing Center also provides Written Feedback by Email and Online Appointments. Be sure to schedule your appointment with enough time to think about and incorporate the feedback you’ll receive. Bring/upload your assignment handout and/or any other relevant materials to your appointment.

**How do I make an appointment?**

To schedule a Face-to-Face, Written Feedback by Email, or Online Appointment, visit [www.depaul.edu/writing](http://www.depaul.edu/writing). You can also call one of our offices: (312) 362-6726 (Loop Office, 1600 Lewis Center) or (773) 325-4272 (LPC Office, SAC 212). When possible, the Writing Center accepts walk-in requests, but it’s always a good idea to schedule your appointment ahead of time. You may schedule tutorials on an as-needed basis or as weekly standing appointments up to 3 hours per week.
All Writing Center services are free to the DePaul community.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students requesting classroom accommodation for disabilities, including LD and AD/HD, should provide me with written documentation from the appropriate university offices regarding the specific disability and accommodation requested during the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential. For more information, contact the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD):
http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/studentswithdisabilities, (773) 325-1677. Offices: Rm 370, Student Center (2250 N. Sheffield), Lincoln Park Campus and Rm 1400, Lewis Center (25 E. Jackson), Loop Campus

**Final Notes:**

- I will make every effort to adhere to this class schedule and grading system, but reserves the right to make necessary changes.

- While laptops, netbooks, tablets, etc. are welcome for taking notes during class, please DO NOT use them to Facebook, IM, email, etc. during class (unless of course you’re visiting our class Tumblr ☺).

- No reading of newspapers, magazines, books, your phone, etc. during class. While I appreciate your support and passion for the news, it is distracting and disrespectful to your classmates and me.

- Please turn your phones to vibrate when in class unless they are needed for emergency purposes. Visibly texting or checking email during class is again distracting and disrespectful to everyone else in the class.

- This class and the assigned work is challenging, but in the end it is rewarding and helps prepare you with knowledge and skills for the successful practice of media relations. If you notice yourself having trouble, please see me immediately. Also feel free to approach me about any concerns you might have.

- Again, the following dates and topics are a good faith attempt at providing you with a tentative schedule, but please note that they are not etched in stone. We will adapt as needed to circumstances.

- If you cannot meet with me during office hours on Tues. and Wed., please see me after class, generally we can meet then, or find another time that works. If you do drop by during office hours, if you e-mail me in advance regarding your question(s), you are likely to get a more detailed answer in person.

- Generally, email is the fastest way to reach me, followed by my office phone. Include “PRAD 562” in the subject heading of your email and make sure to include your full name/contact info in the email. If you have an emergency or need an immediate response, please feel free to try me on my cell phone.

- Media relations is my favorite area of PR and I very much look forward to teaching this class each year!
# Tentative Class Schedule

## Week 1: 1/7
- Course Overview and Introduction
  - Review of syllabus, class blog assignment and weekly Twitter assignment
  - Sign-up sheets to select (1) blog assignment dates and (2) Twitter handles
  - **Guest speaker:** Joe Poulos, EVP, corporate affairs, Edelman

## Week 2: 1/14
- **Media Relations Theory and Research**
- **Best Practices in Goal and Objective Writing**
  - Guest speakers start of class: Discover Financial Services corp. comm. team members
  - Review media relations goal and objectives memo (first assignment)
  - Schedule posted for class blog assignment (blog post and presentation)
  - **REMINDER:** First #PRAD562 tweet due on 1/13 (due each Tues. by midnight)

## Week 3: 1/21
- **Newsworthiness and the Production of News**
  - (1) Media goal and objectives memo due (D2L dropbox)
  - Class blog assignment presentations begin (check your assigned date!)
  - Review media coverage analysis/idea generation assignment
  - Review media databases (LexisNexis, ProQuest, Newsbank) and class exercise

## Week 4: 1/28
- **The Media Agenda and its Influence on Corporate Reputation**
  - Distribute login information for Gorkana media database
  - Teams should be formed/finalized for team assignments
  - **Guest panel:** Professional journalists discuss media relations and PR

## Week 5: 2/4
- **Source Credibility and the Concept of Third-Party Endorsement**
  - (2) Media coverage analysis/idea generation assignment due (submit assignment via D2L dropbox and submit your confidential eval in hard copy form in class)
  - Training at the start of class: Using the Gorkana media intelligence database
  - Review media list builder assignment and class exercise with media database

## Week 6: 2/11
- **Conducting Media Intelligence and Preparing for Interviews**
  - (3) Media list builder assignment due (D2L dropbox & hard copy evals)
  - Review journalist dossier and Q&A guide assignment
  - Class king cake party? (Mardi Gras is on 2/17)
  - **Guest panel:** Public relations professionals discuss media relations and PR

## Week 7: 2/18
- **Perfecting the Media Pitch (and Catch!)*
- Review of Information Subsidies (i.e., Pre-Packaged PR Materials)
  - Overview of final assignment (media relations briefing book/presentation)
  - **Guest speaker:** Julie Wernau, reporter, Chicago Tribune

## Week 8: 2/25
- **Earned Media and Paid Media – Amplifying Third-Party Coverage**
  - (4) Journalist dossiers/Q&A guides assignment due (D2L dropbox & hard copy evals)

## Week 9: 3/4
- **Media Relations Measurement and Evaluation**
  - Review and discussion on linking media goal/objectives to evaluation metrics
  - **Check-in visit with client:** Discover Financial Services

## Week 10: 3/11
- **Review Day and Pizza Party**
  - One-on-one review time with each team; general class review/questions

## EXAM WEEK: 3/18
- (5) **Media Relations Briefing Book team presentations/reports due**
  - Final report submitted electronically via D2L dropbox
  - Hard copies of slide deck and completed team evals due in class
  - **Guest judge(s) attending final presentation:** Discover Financial Services

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>Note: Login to the course D2L page and look under the Readings folder for each week to see the assigned readings for the week. Please be prepared to discuss all assigned readings by the class date for which they have been assigned.