Course: PRAD 564 • Section 101 • Fall 2014

**Corporate Communication**

Class Time: Wednesday 5:45 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Classroom: Loop campus, 14 E. Jackson (Daley bldg.), Rm. 1230

**Professor:** Dr. Matt Ragas, Ph.D.
E-mail: mragas@depaul.edu (preferred contact)
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Class Tumblr: [http://www.depaulcorpcomm.com](http://www.depaulcorpcomm.com)
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Office Phone: (312) 362-6003
Mobile: (407) 963-8763
Office Hours: Mon. & Wed. 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. (and by appointment)

**Course Description:**

This course provides a foundation overview of the corporate communication function, including both internal and external communication. Through readings and discussions, in-class exercises, guest speakers, and a final team project/presentation, students will gain a strong foundation in the fundamentals and major concepts underlying the modern corporate communication function (i.e., corporate reputation and other intangible assets like brands; corporate governance; corporate social responsibility; and stakeholder theory). The course will also provide students with a background in financial fundamentals for communicators, such as public company reporting, financial statements, and the basics of S.E.C. filings. Working in teams on a final project, students will gain practical experience by developing an original case study on a recent real-world business problem in which corporate communication played a major role. This case study will be submitted to the 2015 Arthur W. Page Society and Institute for Public Relations annual Case Study Competition in Corporate Communications. Winners receive cash prizes and earn great recognition to include on their resumes and boost their networking and professional opportunities. The grand prize winner is invited to the awards ceremony dinner of The Page Society in NYC (where they will be recognized by many of the nation’s top corporate communicators).

This class was developed with generous feedback and support from a great group of corporate communicators who are committed to educating the next generation of strategic communication professionals. Guest speakers from the corporate communication profession and related fields will join us over the course of the quarter.

**Course Objectives:**

- To gain familiarity with business terminology and the basics of financial statements so as to communicate more effectively with business managers and other stakeholders.
- To provide an overview of the history, growth, and trends behind the practice of modern corporate communication, including both internal and external communication with various stakeholders.
- To gain an understanding of reputation and intangible assets, corporate governance, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) – all of which have become major focal points for corporate communicators.
- To practice developing and applying this new knowledge of the corporate communication function through developing an original case study for submission to The Page Society case study competition.
To enhance presentation and writing skills in communicating persuasively, clearly, and successfully.

**Required Reading Materials:**

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings and course content are posted to the course page on D2L and are based on a mix of industry and academic articles, as well as case studies, which are appropriate to the assigned topic for each week. Some of the readings will be from draft chapters in the forthcoming *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators* (Palgrave Macmillan, December 2014) by Matt Ragas and Ron Culp.

**Recommended Reading Materials (optional!):**


**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 (posting to class Tumblr at: depaulcorpcomm.com and making a brief presentation about the post topic on your assigned week), 2) weekly #PRAD564 “corp. comm. in the news” tweet (individual assignment), 3) CSR shareholders vs. stakeholder theory short reaction paper (individual assignment), 4) your class attendance and participation during the quarter, including a series of in-class exercises and discussions, 5) S.E.C. filings analysis short paper (individual assignment), 6) case study check-point memo (team assignment), 7) check-point draft of in-progress/partial case study (team assignment) and 8) final project due on last day of class: an original case study with case study abstract, case study paper/report, teaching note and PowerPoint deck (team assignment).
The following provides a point allocation for each of these areas:

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<th>News Blog Assignment (Individual Post and Presentation)</th>
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<td>2) Weekly #PRAD564 tweet (Individual Weekly Tweet)</td>
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<td>3) S.E.C. Proxy Statement Paper (Individual Paper)</td>
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<td>4) CSR Short Reaction Paper (Individual Paper)</td>
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<td>5) Attendance/Participation (Individual Grade)</td>
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<td>6) Case Study “Launch” Memo (Team Assignment)</td>
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<td>7) “Check Point” Draft of In-Progress/Partial Case Study Paper (Team Assignment)</td>
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<td>8) Arthur W. Page Society Case Study Competition/Final Project (Team Assignment)</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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**Course Grading Scale:**

Your final grade is based on the percentage out of 200 possible points that you earned (e.g., 185/200 = 92.5%, which is an A, whereas 184/200 = 92% or A-. I round up partial points .5 or higher to the next whole number.

- 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%

**1) News Blog Post/Presentation Assignment (20 points)**

You will help maintain the class Tumblr (http://www.DePaulCorpComm.com) which will feature summaries and critiques of recent news stories in which corporate communication (including media relations, employee communications, investor relations, CSR, reputation, branding, social media, etc.) plays a major role. You will use the Page Principles to guide your critique/reaction to the issue/news item. By the assigned class date, you will have made your post regarding the recent news story to the blog and will then make a short presentation (~10 minutes) summarizing the key points/events in this news story and then providing your critique/reaction to the corporate communication response. You must engage the class in discussion and use visual aids. **The story you choose must center on a company** (i.e., a for-profit entity **NOT** a non-profit/NGO or government entity as this is a corporate communication-specific class). A detailed assignment sheet will be provided.

**2) Weekly #PRAD564 “Corp. Comm. in the News” Tweet (20 points)**

Starting with week two, each week you will be responsible for tweeting about “corp. comm. in the news” using the hashtag #PRAD564. You must use this exact hashtag to receive credit. **Tweets are due each Tues. by midnight (CT) – no exceptions.** Late tweets will not be accepted. You may tweet about any one of the following three topics: (1) response/comment/question about one of the assigned readings, (2) share a headline/link to a story in the news that week that relates to corporate communication/PR [e.g., mini or major
crisis, reputation or brand issue, CSR/sustainability, corporate governance, external communication, internal communication, financial communication], or (3) respond to a #PRAD564 tweet made by one of your classmates with a thoughtful comment that advances class discussion. I will select two 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. Please note: you cannot earn more than a max of 20 points for this assignment!

3) S.E.C. Proxy Statement Analysis Paper (20 points)

Every good corporate communication professional is competent at navigating S.E.C. EDGAR filings. Choose a publicly-traded company that interests you. You will then review and analyze the most recent “proxy statement” (DEF 14A in S.E.C. filing lingo) for this publicly-traded company. You will be asked to find several pieces of essential information on your company included in this important document, which is filed in advance of a public company’s annual meeting. Your paper will report the required information and, based on the information you have found, you will share your opinion and insights on these findings. The two major sections of the paper, your findings and opinion, should be clearly labeled. We will take time in class to practice accessing S.E.C. filings and how to scan them for relevant information. An assignment sheet will be provided.

4) CSR Short Reaction Paper (20 points)

You will write a 2-4 page double-spaced reaction paper in response to a series of readings offering sharply opposing perspectives on the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). You will briefly summarize these two perspectives (i.e., shareholder theory versus stakeholder theory); integrate in at least three additional relevant readings that you find on this topic; state which of these two perspectives you agree the most with; and make a convincing evidence-based argument for why you have taken this position. The major sections of the paper should be clearly labeled. The paper should include a short logical introduction and conclusion section, as well as a reference page of sources used at the end of the paper. Please be consistent with the formatting and citation style chosen. An assignment sheet will be provided. The required readings will be posted to D2L.

5) Class Attendance/Participation (40 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. E-mail me (mragas@depaul.edu) in advance if you plan to miss a class for a work, family, or health reason and I will 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 will not receive an “A” on the class attendance and participation portion of your grade for simply attending every class (i.e., “showing up”). Active and consistent participation is critical and valued. You only have the potential to earn an “A” on the class attendance and participation part of your grade if you have one unexcused absence or less AND you consistently contribute to class discussion throughout the quarter. Participation is based on the quality and quantity of your contributions over the course of the quarter. A peer evaluation of class participation will be conducted at the end of the quarter.

IMPORTANT: It is your responsibility to sign-in each class. If your signature isn’t on the sign-in sheet, you may be marked as absent. I will always try to remind you.

6) Case Study “Launch” Memo (10 points)

A good original case study takes more than a week or two to research and write. Approximately mid-way through the quarter, you will have formed teams for the final project (case study abstract, report, presentation slide deck, and teaching notes). In this “launch” memo (approx. 2 pages double spaced), you will list the names of your team members and outline the case study you propose for your final project. This memo nudges the
team towards not waiting until the final week or two of the quarter to begin the heavy lifting on writing a top
notch case. Further, it provides an opportunity for me to provide you with feedback and guidance early in the
case creation process. The memo will state: a) name of organization (either company, non-profit, government
entity), b) category or specialty area within field that case addresses, c) brief description of communication-
centered organizational problem, issue and/or crisis (don’t include the solution!), and d) the value and
significance of this proposed case topic to the profession and students/educators (i.e., the old “why does this
matter?” question). Team member evaluations will factor into your grade.

7) “Check Point” Draft of Partial/In-Progress Case Paper (10 points)

As previously discussed, a good case study project takes more than a week to write, particularly when you also
have an abstract, teaching note and a slide presentation to complete. The purpose of requiring you to submit a
“check point” working draft of your case study paper is twofold: (1) Nudge you further along in the researching
and writing of the case so that this work doesn’t pile up until the end and (2) provide you with a penalty free
opportunity by me to review your draft and provide feedback (I’ll also review any work you’ve done on your
abstract, teaching note and PPT deck if you decide to submit it at this time). You are not expected to submit a
full, completed draft of your case study paper. I do expect to see a draft that shows substantive effort (i.e., don’t
just submit a one or two page paper or outline). Team member evaluations will factor into your grade.

8) Final Team Project: Page Society Case Study Competition (60 points)

For your final team project, you will write an original case study for submission to the 2015 Arthur W. Page
Society and Institute for Public Relations (IPR) case study competition. The deadline for entering this year’s
competition is January 16, 2015. In consultation with me, you and your team will develop an original case
which describes a significant organizational problem or crisis (not the longer-term solutions to the problem) in
which effective corporate communication (or the lack thereof) is a major factor. This case should be useful and
of high value to both the profession and students/educators. Your team will develop and submit the following
for this final project: (a) 50-100 word abstract for the case, (b) case study report (typically around 15-20 pages
in length, not inclusive of references, appendices, etc.), (c) teaching note – explicitly refers to specific Page
Principles in the organization’s handling of the business problem(s) (Page Principles shouldn’t explicitly appear
in the actual case). This note will maximize the classroom value of the case by putting the problem into context,
outlining key facts/discussion points, and offering teaching suggestions, and (d) PowerPoint presentation
designed to support classroom discussion. On the final day of class, your team will have submitted the
following files electronically via the Dropbox on D2L and your team will make a timed presentation (~15
minutes) of your case to the class. A detailed assignment sheet will be provided and we will review some of the
prior year’s award-winning Page cases during the quarter to familiarize ourselves with the style preferred by
judges. Team member evaluations will factor into your grade (unless working individually).

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 submission format. Work turned in during the middle or end of class (this includes making a
blog post 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 almost always much worse.

IMPORTANT: Assigned blog post/presentation and final presentation dates cannot be made up at a later date
so please prepare in advance. If a team member is absent the final day, the show must still go on!
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

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.

Team Work

Simply put, the practice of corporate communication and public relations is 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 communicate department, management, other service providers, etc. 40% of your total possible points in this class are based on team-based assignments. You will have the opportunity to evaluate your teammates on this project, which could impact their grade, thereby providing an added incentive for everyone to carry their load.

Guest Speakers

We will have a variety of guest speakers visit us over the course of the quarter to give you first-hand “from the trenches” perspectives on corporate communication. These guests generously take time out of their evenings after a long day of work to come in and speak with us. All that I ask of you is that you offer our guests your full attention. There is no better way to show a guest that you value their time and insights than by asking questions. I pay close attention to how you interact (or don’t interact) with our guests. Guest speakers will form impressions of you, me, the class, and DePaul based on the experience they had visiting the class!

The Writing Center

Consider visiting the Writing Center to discuss your assignments. You may schedule appointments (30 or 50 minutes) on an as-needed or weekly basis, scheduling up to 3 hours worth of appointments per week. Online services include Feedback-by-Email and IM conferencing. All writing center services are free.

Writing Center tutors are specially selected and trained graduate and undergraduate students who can help you at almost any stage of your writing. They will not do your work for you, but they can help you focus and develop your ideas, review your drafts, and polish your writing. They can answer questions about grammar, mechanics, different kinds of writing styles, and documentation formats. They also can answer questions and provide feedback online, through IM/webcam chats and email. Obviously, the tutors won’t necessarily be familiar with every class or subject, but they are able to provide valuable help from the perspective of an interested and careful reader as well as a serious and experienced student-writer.

Schedule your appointments with enough time to think about and use the feedback you’ll receive. Bring your assignment handout and other relevant materials to your appointments.
Quick Links & Locations:

To schedule an appointment at the Center’s LPC and Loop locations: http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/html/sched/WCOnline.html

To schedule real-time conversations with IM and/or webcam: http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/html/sched/im.htm

To request feedback by Email: http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/html/sched/email.html

Loop Campus Office: 1620 Lewis Center, 312.362.6726

Lincoln Park Office: 250 McGaw, 773.325.4272

For more information, visit: http://www.depaul.edu/writing/

Students with Disabilities

Students requesting classroom accommodation for disabilities 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 Productive Learning Strategies Program (PLuS) for LD, AD/HD: http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus, (773) 325-1677 or the Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) for all other disabilities: http://www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/studentswithdisabilities, (773) 325-1677. Offices: Student Center #370.

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 electronic devices like laptops are welcome for taking notes during class discussions, please DO NOT use them to Facebook, IM, e-mail, etc. during class. It is disrespectful to your classmates and me.

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

• Please turn your mobile phones to vibrate when in class unless they are needed for emergency purposes. Also, please NO TEXTING during class (again, unless it is a work or family-related emergency).

• This class is challenging, but in the end it is rewarding and helps prepare you with knowledge and skills for the successful practice of corporate communication. 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, please see me after class, generally we can meet then, or we can find another time that works for both of us. 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.

• I have been passionate about the intersection of business, communication, and the media for as long as I can remember. I look forward to teaching this class and our getting to explore these topics together!
About Your Professor:

Matt Ragas, Ph.D. is academic director of the M.A. in Public Relations and Advertising (PRAD) program and is an assistant professor in the College of Communication at DePaul University. He teaches and researches in subjects at the intersection of business and communication. Matt earned a Ph.D. in Mass Communication with a focus in public relations from the University of Florida and a M.S. in Management and B.S. in Business Administration (marketing major), both from the University of Central Florida. An award-winning teacher and researcher, Matt has authored two books (Prima Publishing and Random House) and more than 40 published or in-press journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, trade articles, and research reports. He is author with colleague Ron Culp of the forthcoming book Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators: Creating Shared Value for the Organization and its Stakeholders (Palgrave Macmillan, December 2014). Prior to pursuing a career in academe, he spent 10 years in industry, working in investment research and publishing, strategic communication, venture capital and digital media consulting positions. Several summers ago, he completed a Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations fellowship for educators in the corporate communication department of Discover Financial Services (NYSE: DFS) at its Riverwoods, Ill. headquarters. Matt now serves on the research committee of the Plank Center. He is currently a Coleman Foundation faculty entrepreneurship fellow. Matt serves on the national operating and membership committees of Page Up, the Arthur W. Page Society affiliated organization for senior communication professionals. He is also chair of the Inez Kaiser Graduate Student of Color Awards program for the Public Relations division of the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication (AEJMC). An active consultant, Matt is an instructor for the Reputation Academy of the Reputation Institute, the world’s leading reputation management consultancy.

For a more detailed backgrounder, visit his faculty profile page: http://communication.depaul.edu/faculty-and-staff/faculty/Pages/ragas.aspx

Or his personal website: www.mattragas.com.

Tentative Guest Speaker Schedule:

Week 1: 9/10: No guest
Week 2: 9/17: No guest
Week 3: 9/24: Mike Trevino, BNSF Railways (Berkshire Hathaway)
Week 4: 10/1: Emily Pukala, Allstate
Week 5: 10/8: Aaron Hoffman, Illinois Tool Works (ITW)
Week 6: 10/15: Kevin Kelly, Morrow & Co.
Week 7: 10/22: Sherry Scott, Gagen MacDonald
Week 8: 10/29: Several of last year’s Page case study winners from this class (PRAD alums)
Week 9: 11/5: Elizabeth Higashi, Higashi Advisors
Bill Parke, CME Group
Week 10: 11/12: No guest

EXAM WEEK: 11/19: Final presentations to Discover Financial Services corporate communication team
Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1: 9/10: Course Overview and Introduction: The Corporate Communication Function
- Assigned readings: See this week’s D2L folder
- Review of syllabus, and class blog and Twitter assignments
- Sign-up sheets to select: (1) blog assignment date and (2) Twitter handles

Week 2: 9/17: Public vs. Private Company Disclosures, S.E.C, Public Company Filings (EDGAR)
- Assigned readings: See this week’s D2L folder
- Schedule posted for class blog assignment (blog post and presentation)
- Overview of proxy statement analysis paper
- Sign-up in-class for public company for your proxy statement short paper
- REMINDER: First #PRAD564 tweet due 9/16 (each Tues. at midnight)

- Assigned readings: See this week’s D2L folder
- Class blog assignment posts and presentations begin (start of class)
- Proxy statement paper due via D2L dropbox (individual assignment)

Week 4: 10/1: Focal Concepts: Corporate Reputation and Intangible Assets
- Assigned readings: See this week’s D2L folder
- Review of reaction paper on dueling perspectives on CSR

Week 5: 10/8: Focal Concepts: Corporate Social Responsibility and Shareholder/Stakeholder Theories
- Assigned readings: See this week’s D2L folder
- Sign-up in-class for teams (max 3 per team) for final project/case study
- CSR reaction paper due via D2L dropbox (individual assignment)

Week 6: 10/15: Focal Concepts: Corporate Governance
- Assigned readings: D2L readings, O’Rourke’s “Analyzing a Case Study” (helps with writing/analyzing cases)& Page case study: “Are All Calories Created Equal?”
- Overview of launch memo, sign-up to form final project teams (team assignment)

Week 7: 10/22: Internal Communication and Corporations
- Assigned readings: D2L readings folder & Page case study: “Tainted Yogurt”
- Review of (1) final team project guidelines and (2) “check point” partial/in-progress draft of case
- Case study launch memo due via D2L dropbox (team or individual assignment)
- Submit completed team eval form confidentially via envelope in class (if applicable)

Week 8: 10/29: External Communication and Corporations
- PRAD Alum Panel: Tips, Tricks and Advice on Writing a Winning Page Case Competition Entry
- Assigned readings: D2L readings & Page case study: “Need for Cultural Intelligence”
- Reminder on “check point” partial/in-progress draft of case paper (due 11/9 via D2L)

Week 9: 11/5: Investor Relations and Financial Communications
- Assigned readings: See this week’s D2L folder & Page case study: “Firing the Founder”
- Check-point in-progress case draft due 11/9 via D2L dropbox – note Sun. at midnight deadline (email me your team eval; will give substantive feedback in class next week!)

Week 10: 11/12: Review Day for Final Project and Pizza Party/Pot Luck
- Review final project and questions, meet one-on-one with each case team/feedback
- Pizza party and pot-luck to celebrate the quarter
- REMINDER: Last #PRAD564 tweet due 11/11 at midnight – no tweet next week!

EXAM WEEK: 11/19: Final Presentations (Arthur W. Page Society Case Study Competition) at Discover Financial Services’ Loop satellite office (Sun-Times building / 350 N. Orleans)
- The following files should be submitted electronically via the D2L dropbox by 5:45 pm CT on 11/19: 1) abstract, 2) case report, 3) PPT deck, 4) teaching note
- Each team should print out and bring a hard copy of the PPT to this class
- Submit completed team eval form confidentially via envelope in class

Note: All readings will be found in the module on D2L that corresponds with the week listed on the syllabus. All readings should be completed by the day of class (i.e., readings listed under the Week 1 module on D2L should have already been completed before the start of the first class on Sept. 10)
Link to assigned Arthur W. Page Society winning case studies to read: http://www.awpagesociety.com/insights/winning-case-studies/