

# Public Relations Ethics & Advocacy

STRM 4706/6706 M50

Fall 2025

Online Fully Asynchronous

## Prof. Taylor Ackerman, APR, MA

She/Her

**Office hours:** Mondays, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Tuesdays, 11 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Tuesdays, 2:30 - 3 p.m.

Wednesdays, 12 - 1 p.m.

Other times available by appointment! If you are wishing to meet during my office hours, please send me a text prior to arriving to confirm which office I'm in or receive a Teams link.

**Email:** [tckerman@memphis.edu](mailto:tckerman@memphis.edu)

**Phone:** 731-225-7656 Text only unless by appointment

Please allow up to 48 hours for an email response M-F. While I don't have an issue with you texting me course questions, please be sure to always include your name and course in the text. Additionally, if texting, please honor my working hours of 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F. I will not respond to any texts on Sundays. If you need to contact me at an off time, please do so via email. Additionally, make sure to use your official U of M email (@[memphis.edu](mailto:memphis.edu)) when contacting me about the course - messages sent via Canvas or from addresses outside the organization could be missed.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

An approach to ethics and advocacy through case studies and their application to the work of public relations professionals as they interact with employers, publics and society as a whole.

### Prerequisites

None

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

*Cases in Public Relations Management: The Rise of Social Media and Activism* (3rd edition) by Patricia Swann. (2019) Routledge. ISBN 9781138088870

*Ethical Voices: Practicing Public Relations with Integrity* by Mark W. McClennan. (2022) Business Expert Press, LLC. ISBN 9781637424186

### Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, there is no required scheduled meeting time for this course. This can be convenient for students juggling several responsibilities, but it also means you must be organized and motivated. Students are able to work at their own pace throughout the week, however work will be due on a weekly basis and it is imperative to stay on track with the course schedule to complete all deadlines on time.

All course discussions should remain respectful and professional, and show respect to all people regardless of background, sex, race, gender or any other factor. Our goal is to foster a positive, encouraging work environment that enables everyone to produce their best work. Hate speech will not be tolerated in any form and could result in a zero on an assignment or dropped from the class for misconduct.

Because this class relies on case studies and situational analysis to understand and apply ethics, individuals may sometimes have different viewpoints or ideas that they bring to the table. We'll be discussing case studies, situations and best practices as a group, and I encourage open conversation and debate, as this is how we grow as professionals and learn! However, I ask that you always remain courteous and respectful in your correspondence with classmates as well as in assignments.

Remember, part of public relations is compromise and seeing the other side of things. (Ahem, mutually beneficial relationships, advocacy, fairness, boundary spanning...) You will get the most out of this class if you are willing to be collaborative and think deeply about the topics we're discussing. Additionally, even though we'll look at some case studies that are clear indications of what not to do (and those are some of the fun ones), always try to consider how the organization or professional likely got to the point they did. Understanding others' mistakes will help us avoid our own.

This course is meant to give you a framework for how to approach situations you may come to face in the field. The thing with ethics is there isn't always one perfect way to handle something - occasionally, you are looking for the best option that upholds as many ethics as possible. As such, be willing to sit on topics for a couple days, think things through, do research, and take in other perspectives. You'll get the most out of this class if you are willing to read materials earlier in the week and allow them to marinate for a day or two before responding or working on assignments.

Students will upload all required assignments to Canvas, and feedback will be given to encourage student improvement. Access to a computer or an electronic device will be required.

All homework and quizzes are due at 11:59 p.m. Sunday night the week they are assigned unless otherwise noted.. To allow time for response and clarification, please reach out with any assignment questions at least 48 hours prior to the deadline.

### **Accessing the course website**

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. Click on the link for STRM 3210 to enter our course

## **Course Requirements**

This course asks you to be mindful of professional values and ethics while being realistic about things you could encounter in the field. This course is meant to

### **Quality of Work**

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of public relations and advertising is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

I expect your work to be good and original, meaning it's yours. If you quote anything or get information from any other source, it should be fully cited. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

### **Chat GPT/AI**

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course. Once permission is granted, AI may only be used as directed. Assignment submissions may run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an assignment. Be prepared to submit any prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

### **Repetition of Courses and Coursework**

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. When in doubt, ask. If I catch work that seems eerily similar to something from a previous class and you have not discussed it with me, it will be an automatic zero. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the resume and logo).

### **Questions about Grades**

If you would like to ask about a grade, let's set up a Teams meeting so we can talk about it with clarity. I'm often flexible about allowing students to redo an assignment they may not be satisfied with *if* they come to me about it in a timely manner and show significant improvements in the work and understanding.

Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your grade and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade. Meeting early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-instructor understanding and quality of work.

## **Course & Campus Resources**

**Students with disabilities & accommodations**

If you will need accommodations through [Disability Resources](#) to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to make sure you are able to be successful in this course.

**Support:** If at any point in the semester you are struggling with the course load or a specific assignment, please reach out to me for a meeting so we can work to get you back on track. I'm happy to help in any way I'm able, but you must be an advocate for yourself by communicating with me and making me aware of any problems. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

I am happy to meet with you outside of class, hop on a Zoom call, or provide support over email. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you find yourself falling behind, feeling overwhelmed, or struggling.

**Meeman Lab Availability:** Open labs 9:30-4:30 Monday-Friday. In addition to Meeman, labs are available in the Tech Hub and the Library. We also have equipment rental available. Check your university email for details.

**Campus and Community Resources:** <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/>

**Resources specific to physical health and wellness:**

[Mental health Services](#)

[UofM Student Health Center](#)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](#)

**If you are affected financially because of COVID-19:**

There are many resources available through the Dean of Students including:

[Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund](#)

[Emergency Food Resources](#), which includes [Tiger Pantry](#)

**Academic Services:**

[Writing Center](#)

[Tutoring](#)

**Communities & Inclusion:**

[Multicultural Affairs](#)

[LGBTQ+](#)

**Grading**

There are 1,000 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class points will be calculated and rounded up to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below. If additional points are added or subtracted from this possible point total, the letter scale will be adjusted.

**A+** = 967 – 1,000 points, **A** = 934 – 966, **A-** = 900 – 933 points

**B+** = 867 – 899 points, **B** = 834 – 866 points, **B-** = 800 – 833 points

**C+** = 767 – 799 points, **C** = 734 – 766 points, **C-** = 700 – 733 points

**D** = 667 – 600 points  
**F** = 600 and fewer points

**Grading Philosophy.** A=Professional quality work that could be use with little or no modification  
B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally  
C=Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision  
D=Barely satisfies minimum requirement and below average quality  
F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirements

## Assignments

Quizzes & Final	<b>150 points</b>
Discussions	<b>250 points</b>
Weekly Assignments	<b>250 points</b>
Historical Figure Project	<b>100 points</b>
Case Study Project	<b>125 points</b>
Ethics Counseling Project	<b>125 points</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,000 points</b>

## 6706 / Honors Component

If you are taking this class as a graduate student, you will need to fulfill an additional research requirement for the course. The specific assignment must be approved with the instructor by the end of the third week of class, and you will have until the end of the eleventh week of class to complete it. Specific expectations and details for each option will be provided upon approval of the project. You can send a proposal to me via email or meet with me via Teams/in person to make your assignment pitch. It is the sole responsibility of you, the student, to get the assignment approved and completed by the stated points in this syllabus. If you do not complete the graduate component and are enrolled in section 6706, you will not receive credit for the course.

Here are a few proposed options for the graduate component. I am willing to hear alternative ideas if you have them:

1. Preparation of an original case study with ethical component ([See Arthur W. Page Society Case Study Competition for examples](#))
2. Analysis of a current event case study with ethical counseling recommendations for the organization (additional to course requirement)
3. Analysis of PRSA or Page Principle Ethical Code Sheet with examples and expanded definitions for each pillar listed (Delivered via presentation or podcast)
4. Professional podcast evaluating a current event with ethical analysis and public relations foundations

## Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

**Quizzes, Midterm & Final:** Quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test your understanding of key course concepts and case study components. One comprehensive exams, a final, will be given to evaluate key course concepts from the readings and course presentations. All quizzes and exams will be given on Canvas with a time limit. You will have two attempts for each quiz/exam with the highest grade taken. You are welcome to use your notes or book to help assist you, but working with another student is prohibited. Quizzes and exams will not be accepted late.

**Weekly Assignments:** Weekly assignments will vary in nature as well as points and be used to build on the concepts we are learning each week in class, as well as gauge your progress in the course. There will not be an assignment every single week, however it is the student's responsibility to check Canvas for upcoming due dates and required assignments.

**Discussions:** Discussions will be posted to the discussion board on Canvas with a prompt. Students are expected to engage with any linked media/readings prior to responding to the prompt and then make their own original discussion post. Then, to receive full credit for the discussion, students must respond to *at least* two classmates.

The whole point of a discussion question is to discuss. This class has interesting material that requires being discussed to fully understand - discussions are **not** busy work. As such, original posts should thoroughly explore the topic at hand and give reasoning for your viewpoint. Replies should build on, challenge or explore the perspectives given by your classmates. Simply responding "I agree", "I disagree", or "Good post!" won't count as a reply/receive credit.

The best way to succeed with discussion questions is to check in a few times through the week. I plan to watch the discussions and make replies throughout the week as well, and I'd love to see the discussion as a place of back and forth as well as further learning. Doing the bare minimum in discussions will result in a bare minimum grade. :)

**Projects:** Three larger projects will be completed throughout the semester to explore different components of the course. Additional details and rubrics will be provided on Canvas for each assignment - the following is simply an overview:

The first, the historical figure project, will have you do research about a major figure in public relations or journalism and explain what they have brought to the field as we know it today and explain how we can learn from them. A list of historical figures/cases will be provided for you to choose from, as well as specific prompts regarding subject matter.

The second, the case study project, will have students dive deeper into a recent case study and explore the main themes, ethical components and details surrounding what occurred.

The third, the ethics counseling project, will have students introduce their own hypothetical ethics situation with details and specifics as well as provide ethics counseling for that situation. The ethics counseling project should build on class concepts and knowledge gained by looking at PR best practices and ethical guidelines.

**Formatting:** All assignments should be turned in as a .DOC or .PDF file unless otherwise stated. If a file is submitted in a format that is not accessible to the professor, the student will have one warning to turn in the correct file within 48 hours of contact. If the file is not turned in within this time frame, faculty is not responsible for grading the assignment. The student will only receive the warning on one assignment; subsequent file issues will count towards a late grade.

When assignments ask a specific question, students are encouraged to write out the question before answering in their turned in document or discussion.

## Miscellaneous Policies

**Late Work:** In strategic media deadlines are imperative. In the field, we are often creating work for clients or pitch meetings with hard deadlines. As such, try to turn everything in on time. I do recognize life happens, and as such if you have to turn something in late, the following late policy will apply with the exception of quizzes and discussions which will not be accepted late.

<24 hours late: 5% off

<48 hours late: 10% off

<One week late: 20% off

One to three weeks late: 30% off

Over three weeks late: No credit

## Course Schedule

**Week 1, Aug. 25 - 31:** Welcome to the class!

**Read/Listen/Watch:** The core of ethics in professions lecture

Course welcome video/procedures and expectations

Syllabus

**Activities & Assignments:** Syllabus quiz

Intro discussion

Your view on ethics

**Week 2, Sept. 1 - 7:** Ethical codes introduced

**Read/Listen/Watch:** PRSA Code of Ethics

The Page Principles

Historical project details

**Activities & Assignments:** Ethical code presentation

Claim your historical figure

**Week 3, Sept. 8 - 14:** Historical project work week

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Strategic media ancestry lecture

**Activities & Assignments:** Historical figures project

**Week 4, Sept 15 - 21:** Looking into honesty

**Read/Listen/Watch:** *Ethical Voices readings*

Honesty lecture

**Activities & Assignments:** Quiz one over ethical codes, professional values and historical figures  
Discussion on honesty and relationships

**Week 5: Sept. 22 - 28:** Honesty in action + reflection

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Assigned case studies (Swann & linked)

**Activities & Assignments:** Case study assignment

Discussion over classmates historical projects/evolution of the field

Quiz over honesty and truth

**Week 6: Sept. 29 - Oct. 5:** Loyalty & Fairness

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Case studies in Swann book

Reading in *Ethical Voices*

Uploaded case study (Bridge Collapse)

**Activities & Assignments:** People first discussion

Decision making matrix assignment

**Week 7 & 8: Oct. 6 -19:** Expertise

*(doubled up weeks due to fall break)*

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Case study (mini's)

Reading in *Ethical voices*

Current event case study assignment details

**Activities & Assignments:** Expertise discussion

Quiz over fairness, loyalty and expertise

Midsemester reflection

**Week 9: Oct. 20 - 26:** Ethics counseling

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Recognizing and responding to ethical situations lecture/linked sources

Reading in *Ethical Voices*

Putting together a case study details

**Activities & Assignments:** Research for current event case study

Case study workshop discussion

**Week 10: Oct. 27 - Nov. 2:** Putting together the evidence

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Linked resources

**Activities & Assignments:** Current event case study project

**Week 11: Nov. 3 - 9:** Mash up + framework for decisions

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Multimedia resources

Linked articles

Ethical framework project details

**Activities & Assignments:** Discussion

**Week 12: Nov. 10 - 16:** Advocacy

*Please note that spring registration begins Nov. 10. You will have need to met with your advisor about a spring schedule and been cleared in order to register.*

*Final drop day for full-term classes is Nov. 15.*

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Advocacy lecture

Reading in *Ethical Voices*

Linked articles



Uploaded framework projects

**Activities & Assignments:** Advocacy discussion

**Week 13: Nov. 17 - 23: It all comes to this!**

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Final case studies – linked/Swann

**Activities & Assignments:** Framework Project

Extra credit opportunity

**Week 14: Nov. 24 - 30:**

*Thanksgiving Break Nov. 26 - 30; Nothing due this week*

**Week 15: Dec. 1 – 7: Ethics and advocacy**

**Read/Listen/Watch:** Review lectures, course notes, case study takeaways

**Activities & Assignments:** Final quiz (comprehensive, with emphasis on advocacy)

Wrap up discussion

Any final exam and/or final project will be due via Canvas on Sunday, Dec. 7. Your last day to submit any late work for the semester is also Sunday, Dec. 7.

This schedule will change as needed to suit course needs.

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 4706**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which **they work**.

### **How professional values and competencies will be met**

*Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)*

- Explore the theory and practice of social advocacy.
- Understand the history, process, and effects of digital activism.
- Understand the tools and forms of activism.
- Recognize ethical principles and how they can be utilized in different situations.

### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Analyze international and domestic social advocacy for ethical standards and practices.
- Conduct research on a current social cause and understand how digital media have been utilized in the public relations management of the cause.
- Deliberate and informed contributions to regular class discussion.

### **How assessment of student learning will be met**

#### *Awareness*

- Grow awareness of ethical principles in public relations.
- Deepen knowledge of social advocacy movements, particularly historical movements.
- Understand the tools and forms of social advocacy.

#### *Understanding*

- Explain theoretical and practical knowledge about social advocacy, especially in a social/digital landscape.
- Apply ethical understandings to a variety of social advocacy case studies and movements.
- Discussion questions will be posed in class to stimulate critical thinking. Independent thinking is encouraged.

#### *Application*

- Evaluate a community social advocacy campaign for effectiveness, public relations management, and connection to ethical principles.
- Develop a social advocacy project of their own, based upon the knowledge gained from learning about other projects and movements.
- Critique and evaluate the work of classmates and the social advocacy projects they present.

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)

A current résumé

A personal profile

Contact information/means of contact

Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

## **Email**

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

## **Electronic devices**

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

## **AI/Chat GPT**

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

## **Attendance**

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

## **Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission,

or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

### **Academic integrity**

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

### **Online SETEs**

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment

must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.