

PR Case Studies

PBRL 3409-M50

Fall 2020

Online

Professor Taylor Ackerman

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Appointments: Available via Zoom meetings Tuesdays 1-3 p.m. or by appointment

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Case studies and typical public relations problems; planning and preparation of communications materials for various media; application of public relations techniques.

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Required: Brunner, B.R. & Hickerson, C.E. (2019). *Cases in public relations: Translating ethics into action*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-063138-3

Other readings, case studies, and class materials will be assigned and posted to eCourseware. You will be expected to read all assigned materials each week. You will also be expected to stay up to date with current news and be conversant with **breaking news having public relations, crisis management or critical thinking implications. Pay attention carefully, because you will need to select one current event with PR implications to present to the class.**

Classroom format

This class is delivered online in an asynchronous format, meaning that you will work at your own pace each week to cover the lecture, readings, and assignments. I'm available to answer any questions or concerns each week via email or zoom. I'll make weekly announcements regarding current assignments, thoughts on the cases, and the content we'll be covering. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss any questions, concerns, or confusions with me as soon as they become evident.

Students will write and submit assignments that will be returned with feedback via eCourseware meant to encourage student improvement over the course of the semester. Assignments will encourage students to look at the case studies critically and apply the theories and ethics they've learned so far. Because this is a case study course that focuses on problem solving and communication efforts, there won't only be one right or wrong answer. Instead of coming up with the perfect response (if that even exists), our goal here instead is to offer solutions that meet both the organizations' and publics' needs while remaining ethical and professional. Being able to explain how you came to your conclusion and defend your strategies is an important part of your success in this course.

Students will also take five quizzes throughout the semester to determine progress and make sure they are keeping up with appropriate readings and assignments.

This course is meant to improve your problem solving skills when it comes to PR dilemmas, as well as build an ethical framework within you that will help you to best tackle communication issues in your career. This course is all about application of the techniques you've been learning.

In addition to the cases outlined in our course schedule, each week there will be supplemental videos and readings posted to eCourseware for you to review. Please make sure you carefully review the directions and assignments each week as details of the assignments will change depending on the type of case we're looking at.

All work and papers submitted must reflect critical thinking and knowledge of the material. In all our assignments, elaboration and examples (from the text, media examples or elsewhere) are required. Please make sure to properly cite any examples used. Written assignments will be graded on content AND grammar, spelling, punctuation, and AP style (GSPS). Please refer to the grading rubrics on eCourseware for complete details.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3409 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

Course Requirements

Assignments: Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time (Central Standard Time). Assignments will be due Sundays at 11:59 p.m. Please make sure that you are carefully reading the assignment guidelines each week as they will vary depending on the type of case we are looking at.

Case Study Presentation: Each student will present a mini crisis case study from our course. Presentations will need to be between 5 and 10 minute and can be in a powerpoint or video format. Presentations should offer a background and explanation of the case, as well as a critical assessment of what happened and suggestions for ways the case could have been better handled. Additional details will be provided on eCourseware.

Crisis Communication Project: Part of this class includes analyzing how PR professionals choose to communicate with their key publics and the channels they use. In order to present an understanding of communication strategies, you will be required to create TWO communication pieces that correspond with a case from your textbook. You can choose two of the following types of pieces: Social media post, press release, video statement, blog post, podcast interview, television interview, news article, infographic.

More details on this assignment will be provided separately in eCourseware.

Current Event Case Study Presentation: Each student will present a case study from current events (must be within six months) to fellow classmates. The presentation will need to offer an explanation of the case/event/issue, a background into the organization/problem, an analysis of communication efforts taken during/after the issue, and a recommendations/analysis of the case and the way it was handled by PR professionals. The presentation will also need to include the ethical dilemmas presented within the case. Presentations can be in powerpoint, video, or essay format. Additional details will be provided on

eCourseware.

Quizzes: There will be a total of five quizzes throughout the semester to make sure that you are learning the objectives of the course and reading your case studies. There will also be questions on the quizzes taken out of the supplemental articles and videos assigned each week, so make sure to keep up with everything in the weekly folders in eCourseware. You will have two attempts for each quiz with the highest grade sticking.

Discussions: There will be a total of six discussions via the discussion board in eCourseware throughout the semester. PR Case Studies is a class that thrives best on peer-to-peer learning, meaning that you will learn just as much from your fellow classmates on the case studies as you will from myself or the textbook. This means that being engaged in the discussions is imperative. On the weeks you have a discussion question, you will be required to make your initial posting prior to Thursday at 11:59 P.M. Then, you will have until Sunday at 11:59 P.M. to respond to at least two classmates with thoughtful responses to their postings. Students are encouraged to include outside examples from media, current events, and other case studies in their postings and responses.

Live Case Discussion: Throughout the semester you will be required to attend two “live” case discussions with myself and your classmates to discuss our cases via zoom. More details will be provided on eCourseware.

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, students will be provided with an updated point to letter grade scale.

Individual Assignments

Quizzes (Total of 5, 50 points each)	250 points
Weekly Assignments (Total of 8, 25 points each)	200 points
Discussions (Total of 6, 25 points each)	150 points
Crisis Communication Project	100 points
Case Study Presentation	100 points
Current Event Case Study Presentation	100 points
Live Case Discussion (Total of 2, 50 points each)	100 points
Total	1,000 points

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 requirement.

Other issues

Contacting me. Please make sure not to use the e-mail within ecourseware to contact me and instead reach out using my Memphis e-mail (tckerman@memphis.edu). If there is any kind of confusion about a project or assignment or you are having trouble keeping up, please reach out immediately.

Directions. As this is a case study course, we are going to look at a variety of cases and materials this semester. As such, your assignments and discussions will vary each week, so it is imperative for you to always carefully read the directions and questions asked.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, August 17 -23: Introduction to Case Studies & the Course

- Complete Discussion Question
- Complete Assignment 1

Week 2, August 24- 30: Ethics

- Chapter 2
- Complete Assignment 2

Week 3, August 31 - September 6: Ethics

- Quiz 1
- Complete Discussion 2

Week 4, September 7 - 13: Conflict & Crisis Management

- Chapter 3
- Cases: *The Lands' End Content Marketing Debacle* (p. 26); *Ethical and Effective: Post-Crisis Stakeholder Relations* (p. 41)
- Complete Assignment 2

Week 5, September 14 - 20: Social Media & Technology

- Chapter 4
- Case: *Applebee's Social Media "Meltdown"* (p. 71); *Guitar Hero Strikes a Chord: Social Media Teaches Customer Service Lesson* (eCourseware)
- Complete Discussion 3

Week 6, September 21 - 27: Social Media & Technology

- Cases: *Ethical Activism? Food Babe, Big Food, and the Online Pressure for Disclosure* (p. 145)
- Quiz 2

Week 7, September 28 - October 4: Corporate Social Responsibility

- Chapter 5
- Cases: *All Your Clothes are Made with Exploited Labor, Patagonia (p. 88)*; *Making Plastic Green: Capital One's Commitment to Sustainability (p. 348)*
- Complete Assignment 4
- Presentation on Assigned Case Study Due

Week 8, October 5 - 11: Consumer Relations (Chapter 6)

- Chapter 6
- Cases: *Volkswagen the Betrayer: A Case Study of Gross Disregard for the Welfare of Stakeholders Worldwide (p. 122)*; *Blackfish Backlash: SeaWorld's Attempt at Navigating a Crisis Situation (p. 129)*
- Complete Assignment 5

Week 9, October 12 - 18: Employee Relations

- Cases: *Food Fight: How Ethical management Saved Market Basket (136)*; *Two Employees with a Video Camera: Social media and a Damaged Global Domino's Brand (eCoureware)*
- Test 3
- Complete Assignment 6

Week 10, October 19 - 25: Community Relations

- Chapter 7
- Cases: *"Do Not Use!": Ethical Implications of the 2014 Elk River Chemical Spill (p. 156)*; *Shifting Blame: Addressing the Complicated Ethical Responsibility in the Flint Water Crisis (p. 171)*
- Complete Discussion 5

Week 11, October 26 - November 1: Health PR

- Chapter 9
- Cases: *Healthcare Public Relations and Moral Obligations: Boston University Medical Center Tuberculosis Case (p. 210)*; *Emergent Ethical Healthcare PR in the Digital Age (p. 217)*; *Healthcare Organizations and Patient Safety (p. 224)*
- Presentation on Currents Events Case Study Due

Week 12, November 2 - 8: Nonprofits & Education

- Chapter 12
- Case: *The Wounded Warrior Project (p. 292)*
- Test 4
- Complete Assignment 7

Week 13, November 9 - 15: Trends & Future of PR

- Chapter 13
- Case: *Taking a Swipe at Apple: The FBI v. Apple, Inc. (p. 325)*
- Crisis Communications Project Due

Week 14, November 16 - 22: Course Wrapup

- Course Wrap Up & Study Guide for Fin
- Complete Discussion 6

Week 15, November 23- 24: Finals

- Final Exam

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Five Pillars in PBRL 3409

- *Professionalism*: Students learn the professional and ethical standards of the public relations industry by discussing current events and case examples.
- *Writing*: Students focus on the application of the four-step process of public relations. Students dissect cases, identify each step in the process and discuss, write case briefs or present the ramifications.
- *Multimedia*: Students learn how to create formal PR communications for a variety of mediums including social media.
- *Critical Thinking*: Students demonstrate an understanding of each step in the public relations process through case analysis. Additionally, students discuss the ethical components of each case and how to apply ethical principles to daily job decisions.
- *Media Literacy*: Students increase their media literacy by looking at previous events where public relations affected the outcome. Students discuss each step in the public relations process and their impact.

Professional values and competencies for PBRL 3409

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions shaping communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communication.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.

How professional values and competencies will be met

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

- Apply knowledge of public relations theories and concepts in various professional settings to build problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Develop counseling and peer feedback skills
- Build teamwork skills
- Distinguish between goals, objectives, strategies and tactics using the case method: diagnosing public relations problems and suggesting solutions with detailed messages, timelines, budgets and details

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

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and presentations
- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Practice breaking down academic research articles to their most important points to facilitate their understanding of the first steps in synthesizing a broad array of information.
- Lead and participate in class discussions that deepen their understanding of theories and how they apply to the real world.
- Understand and discuss how different public relations processes lead to difficult outcomes in various professional settings
- Successfully analyze and prescribe solutions for text and contemporary problems
- Work in teams to plan solutions focusing on goals, objectives, strategies and tactics
- Offer constructive criticism by evaluating the work of their peers on a group project

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media
- Learn about the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content or responding to a public relations crisis
- Learn how public relations opportunities and problematic issues are forecasted, identified and managed in today's media environment
- Learn about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations crisis situations

Understanding

- Identify opportunities and solve public relation problems
- Define publics, paying special attention to diversity among organizational constituencies and the implications of diversity in the development of public relations plans

- Examine motivators among publics, stakeholders, and organizations and understand how that affects message content
- Recognize appropriate message content and media platform selection while conforming to budgetary limitations
- Understand public relations practitioners are advocates for clients, but must operate within ethical guidelines

Application

- Read textbook chapter materials and engage in meaningful class discussion about the topics
- Review textbook or contemporary cases and answer accompanying questions, submitting individually written assessments or delivering case presentations. Each assessment or presentation will be graded
- Execute quality discussions with classmates, contributing in meaningful ways, speaking respectfully, and working together to accomplish potential solutions. This will be done in our discussion boards and in live case analysis. Develop a public relations industry-news diet, keeping abreast of contemporary cases as they unfold and engaging in discussion on the topics in class
- Complete periodic exams covering textbook materials and contemporary case problems

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or Squarespace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional lives, 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
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files and writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

Electronic devices

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

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade ("C-") in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

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. 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 résumé and logo).

Academic integrity

In addition to University-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in

substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating 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, as this is a journalism and strategic media class, students are expected to comply with copyright law 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. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. 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. *(Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018)*

Online SETEs

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray "Student" tab; 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 very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. 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.

AP Style and grammar

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

Disability and accommodations

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Diversity and inclusivity

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. **Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind.** Media reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

Student support

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can

help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.

COVID-19 protocols for this course

Student Accommodations

Students with accessibility issues or learning accommodation issues due to a disability should contact Disability Resources for Students (DRS) to submit an official request for course accommodations. Contact DRS at 901.678.2880 or at drs@memphis.edu. (<https://www.memphis.edu/drs/index.php>)

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly, through participation or assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class in addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular institutional disciplinary procedures. (<https://www.memphis.edu/osa/students/academic-misconduct.php>)

Student Health

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at deanofstudents@memphis.edu.

Student Resources

Students who need additional resources can visit the Dean of Students Office website at <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php>.