

PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY AND RESEARCH

Fall Semester 2020

Syllabus

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Course: MEJO 830.1 | **Schedule:** Mon. 9:45 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. | **Location:** Remote (TBA if F2F)

Final Exam: May 1, 12-3 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Lucinda Austin

Office Hours: M: 9:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Office: Carroll 375

Remote by appointment on Zoom

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DESCRIPTION

This course provides an opportunity to explore concepts and frameworks in public relations and strategic communication, how they are applied academically and professionally, and how you can employ them in your research and practice. In addition to the basic theoretical foundations, we will explore some areas of particular interest to you and your work. Both Master's and PhD students may participate in this class and should use this course to further your degree aspirations. Master's students find this class a helpful means of preparing the thesis literature review (or even your proposal); PhD students should produce a paper suitable for conference or journal submission.

GOAL

The goal of this course is to enable students to understand and critique public relations theory and research and apply this theory towards practical problems.

OBJECTIVES

- Gain an understanding of academic research in public relations/strategic communication theory and how that research applies to practice
- Critique and evaluate existing theoretical literature through class presentations, written reports, and group discussions
- Make an independent argument (your paper) to utilize or modify existing theoretical concepts, or to propose new directions for theory that affects the public relations practice

COURSE VALUES

- **Integrity and honesty:** All work should be your own, including research reports, tests, etc.
- **Completeness and thoroughness:** The best projects will meet all the objectives and requirements of the assignment.
- **Preparedness:** Complete reading assignments before class and be prepared to participate in class discussions. Turn assignments in on time.
- **Accuracy:** Data must be accurate and not falsified.
- **Professional courtesy:** Demonstrate courtesy toward your fellow classmates. Respect diverse backgrounds and opinions so that we may all gain insights from one another. Avoid disruptive classroom behaviors.

ACEJMC CORE COMPETENCIES:

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies. This course is particularly relevant to the following competencies:

- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

The full list of competencies is available here: <http://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/nine-standards>.

HONOR CODE

All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Honor Code. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance (<http://instrument.unc.edu>). Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Heidi Hennink-Kaminski, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

All work submitted for this course must be your own work. All sources used for information must be properly cited. The ideas and content within your materials must be original and not copied from others. In our industry, we are expected to be original and creative all of the time. If you have any questions about whether your use of reference material is appropriate, please see me. If any part of your work is judged by me and an independent faculty member or plagiarism software to reflect inappropriate use of reference material, I reserve the right to adjust assignment and course grades downwards, in addition to reporting suspected violations as described in the preceding paragraph.

TEXTBOOK AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Selected readings (typically articles from research journals) will be assigned for each class day. Readings will be made available through Teams. See week by week.

APA Style Guide, 7th Edition: papers must use APA Style. You may use Purdue Owl's APA Style Guide reference for assistance:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Participation

This course is organized as a seminar, and as such it is premised on active discussion. You are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss them. Critical interpretations of the literature encountered in the course are particularly valued.

Discussion Questions

Each class period there are readings, you are expected to post two critical discussion questions to the forum on

Teams (labeled with the correct class date). We may use these posts as the starting point for classroom discussion. Therefore, you should give context to your questions and explain what prompted your questions. Your questions might stem from what the researchers investigated and found, and how that contrasts to what other articles found. You could also ask how topics covered in the readings might apply in other domains. Your questions should be broad, not narrowly asking why they studied a specific element. Consider the broader implications of the research. Questions are due by 8 a.m. on class days.

In-progress Presentation Assignments

You will be presenting your in-progress research in class periodically throughout the course both formally and informally.

Theory in Action

You will be asked to present an example of theory in action from a recent news story, public relations campaign, or other applied example. These will occur at the start of each class and you will sign up based on the topics that interest you.

Paper Synopsis

This assignment is a one-page synopsis or outline of the topic you plan to address in your final paper. This should convey why you are personally and professionally interested in the topic, as well as what the contribution to the field/organization will be.

Annotated Bibliography

Critical assessment of at least ten sources that will help you develop your final paper. These sources should be academic in nature – books, academic journals (e.g., *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*), etc. Although trade magazines (*PR Week*, *Advertising Age*) may have useful background, they should not be the focus of this exercise. Instead – get your feet wet in the theoretical lit. Below are a few sources to help guide you in this endeavor.

- UCSC Library – How to write an annotated bibliography:
<http://library.ucsc.edu/ref/howto/annotated.html>
- Online Writing Lab (OWL) – Annotated bibliographies
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>

First Draft

This assignment is designed so I can give you feedback on what you've accomplished. If you're doing a literature review for your thesis, you should include as far as you have gotten on: (1) Introduction to your topic – what is the purpose of this paper? (2) Critical assessment of relevant literature related to your topic. What have others discussed? What areas could still use some attention? (3) Research questions – how will you apply the theory/theories you've explored in your thesis? You may access copies of completed theses projects and traditional research theses through the Park Library website. For PhD students or anyone planning to submit a conference paper, outline the methods section, including proposed study design, measures, analysis plan, etc.

Final Paper

This assignment is the full proposal. Revise your paper based on comments on the first draft. Anyone aiming for conference submission should now write up the methods and also include as much of the results and discussion as possible. A deadline is provided, but if you are submitting to a conference, consider turning in your paper early so you have time to receive feedback and incorporate it into your submission.

Final Paper Presentation

This assignment is designed to give you practice presenting in a conference-style format and to receive feedback on your work.

Article Critique

You will complete a written critique of a scholarly article, present a summary in class, and lead a short discussion about it. Your article must be theory-based and must present a study (i.e., with data) or critical review, similar to the articles we have been discussing in class. For the theoretical framework, you may choose a theory we are covering in class OR a theory that is not covered in the syllabus but that is perhaps more applicable to the topics you are studying. The written critique should be no longer than two single-spaced pages.

Grading Breakdown

Participation/In-Class Assignments (Discussion Questions; Theory in Action; Presentations in progress)	20%
Article Critiques	10%
Draft Paper Elements: Synopsis, Annotated Bibliography, and Initial Draft	30%
Final Paper Presentations	10%
Final Paper	30%
Total	100%

Grading Scale

Graduate grades are H, P, L, F. Your grade is determined by active participation in class, the quality of your assignments, and your work in relation to others.

Grade	Description
H	Mastery of course content at highest level; Outstanding attainment and truly outstanding performance in the class and on assignments
P	Strong performance overall in the class and on assignments; Solid attainment
L	Marginal attainment; Performance in the class and on assignments below the acceptable level for graduate students. Able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in only some instances. May not be participating or handing in assignments on time.
F	Failed performance; Unacceptable attainment. May be missing class, failing to read or engage with the material, or unwilling to apply the material.

COURSE POLICIES

All students are expected to be in class on time. Please read all assignments before class so you may join our class conversations. This is a group-learning environment. Please come to class with ideas, comments, etc.

All course information is posted on Teams and most assignments will be uploaded using Teams: You will find the course syllabus, course schedule, assignments, supplemental readings and other important information about the course on Teams. Additional information will be posted throughout the semester for upcoming course dates and assignments and you can message other students through Teams. In an effort to make this class as “paperless” as possible, most assignments, other than exams, will be posted on Teams and assignments should be uploaded via Teams. It is your responsibility to keep up with Teams and the content there.

Attendance and participation: This course is organized as a seminar, and as such it is premised on active discussion. As such, weekly attendance is expected when class is being held synchronously. You are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss them. Critical interpretations of the literature encountered in the course are particularly valued. Attendance will be taken during each and every class at the beginning of class and attendance will count towards your participation grade in the course. Exceptions may exist for COVID related situations—please contact the professor directly.

Deadlines are firm. If you miss a deadline, you will receive a 10% reduction in your assignment grade for each 24-hour period the assignment is late. After 72 hours, the assignment will not be accepted and will be given a grade of zero. Late assignments must be e-mailed or handed to me personally. Since most assignments are submitted via Sakai, you can submit an assignment online in advance if you are unable to be in class the day an assignment is due.

Religious Holiday Observance: Per university policy, students should request a university approved absence in advance of class for religious holiday observance: <https://attendance.unc.edu/university-approved-absences-request/>. Students are responsible for applying for the excused absence two weeks in advance of the date requested or as soon as possible if the date occurs within the first two weeks of the semester. This policy does not apply during the final examination period.

Student Accommodations: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office (919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu). Detailed information about the registration process is available at <https://ars.unc.edu/students/new-applicants/connect-ars>. Please understand that I'm not qualified or permitted under University policies to provide any disability-related accommodations without authorization from ARS.

Diversity: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the university's nondiscrimination policies.

Harassment: We all have the right to our opinions. In the classroom, everyone should feel comfortable expressing his or her opinions. We do not need to agree but we do need to respect others' thoughts. The University does not tolerate harassment. Please support your classmates' and others' right to worship, act, look, and think, in their own way. Harassment is a violation of the Honor Code, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and Title IX. If you are harassed or feel threatened, please bring it to my attention at an appropriate time or contact the Dean of Students (dos@unc.edu, 919-966-4042). The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the Academic Catalog: <https://unc.policystat.com/policy/4514917/latest>.

CLASS SCHEDULE

***Schedule is subject to change—always use the updated version on Teams.** Any revisions to the following outline will be discussed in class and posted on Teams. Reading assignments will be posted on Teams under Resources.

Date	Content	Due
Mon., Aug. 10	Overview Introduction Syllabus	
Mon., Aug. 17	Thinking about theory and practice / Classic PR conceptual frameworks	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Aug. 24	Conceptualizing Publics	<i>Paper Synopsis Due</i>

	<i>Theory in Action Presentation</i> 2nd Half of Class: Professor Check-ins	<i>IRB Application Discussion with Professor (if needed)</i> Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Aug. 31	Organization Public Relationships <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Sep. 7	Agenda Building/Media Relations <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Sep. 14	Agenda Setting/Framing <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Sep. 21	Advocacy, Activism, and Mobilization <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	Annotated Bibliography Due Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Sep. 28	Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Advocacy <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	<i>In Progress Presentations</i> Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Oct. 5	Leadership, CEO Activism, and Internal Communication <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i> 2nd Half of Class: Professor Check-ins	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Oct. 12	Crisis Communication <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Oct. 19	Article Critique Presentations	<i>Article Critiques Due</i>
Mon., Oct. 26	Measurement and Evaluation <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Nov. 2	Race and Ethnicity in Public Relations <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i>	<i>Initial Paper Draft Due</i> Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Nov. 9	Global Public Relations <i>Theory in Action Presentation</i> 2nd Half of Class: Professor Check-ins	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Mon., Nov. 16	Last Day of Class Presentations	<i>Presentations Due</i>
Mon., Nov. 23	Final exam	Final papers will be turned in as the final exam