

MEJO 830.1: Public Relations Theory and Research

Fall 2023
Wednesday, 12:30-3:15 pm
CA 338

Instructor

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Course Description

This course is designed to examine theoretical approaches and their applications in the field of public relations.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- To examine theoretical/conceptual development in public relations research and practices.
- To explore methodological frameworks used in public relations research and practices.
- To learn how to independently plan, conduct, and report an academic research project or professional project.
- To generate a new body of knowledge in the field of public relations.

ACEJMC Competencies

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their 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://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

Accessing readings and other scholarly articles: Most of the required readings are available to you on Sakai under “Resources.” Many of the articles are available online, too. To find full text of these and other scholarly articles from off-campus locations, log in to the university library system first. Then search for the article on Google Scholar or an electronic research database. Our Park Library website has links to many tools under “Scholarly Articles”:

<http://parklibrary.mj.unc.edu/>

Recommended Reading

Shoemaker, P. J., Tankard, J. W., & Lasorsa, D. L. (2004). *How to build social science theories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grades: The graduate scale (H, P, L, F) is in effect for all assignments for this seminar. Yes, it’s a bit ambiguous, so here are the basic grading criteria I will follow:

- **H** = Your very best work. These students read and critically engage with all materials. Their class participation and written assignments demonstrate the ability to apply the materials, extrapolate ideas, expand the material into new areas of thought, and contribute to the body of scholarship in the area. *Reserved for truly extraordinary work – I will actually say “wow!”*
- **P** = Your very best work. These students read and critically engage with all materials. They are able to apply the material and to extrapolate ideas in many instances.
- **L** = Students read most of the material but do not often critically engage with it. They are able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in some instances.
- **F** = Students miss one or more classes without prior arrangement, do not always read the material, and fail to critically engage with it.

Attendance

University Policy

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University approved absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by Accessibility Resources and Service and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students, Gender Violence Service Coordinators, and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC).

Please be aware that you are bound by the Honor Code when making a request for a University approved absence. (source: <http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>)

Class Policy

Instructors may work with students to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), **you have upto two absences of this kind during a semester without penalty. Three absences or more will proportionately affect your participation grade.** Please communicate with me early about potential absences.

Honor Code

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. 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 Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

ARS

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 barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Title IX

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy On Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office, or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Diversity Statement

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harassment and discrimination](#). In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and 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.

Mask Use

All enrolled students are required to the university guideline.

Professionalism

Graduate students must be professional in every sense. Professionalism in this course means:

- Attending class throughout the semester.
- Being prepared for class (including completion of readings and thoughtful ideas for class discussion)
- Treating classmates with respect during discussions and other interactions.
- Completing class and project assignments on time. Your grade will be reduced by 25 percent for each day it is late.

Accuracy

The value of your work and creativity are neutralized by errors. You will be graded down when your work contains factual errors, grammatical flaws and/or misspelled words. Refer to the latest edition of *American Psychological Association Manual* on all questions relating to correct style.

Form

Prepare all work as if it were to be submitted in a professional setting. No handwritten work will be accepted. Unless specified otherwise, all writing assignments should be (1) submitted on 8 X 11 inch paper; (2) printed on one side of the page only; (3) prepared in a 12-point typeface; and (4) free of handwritten corrections.

Evaluation

Research project: You will research an area of public relations/strategic communication of interest to you. The main objectives are 1) to summarize the current literature in a specific area, with emphasis on the role of theory in that area, and 2) to propose a theory-based research study/professional project. The assignment will put to work many of the skills that you are learning in your graduate program, including: reviewing and synthesizing the literature, proposing innovative ideas in a field of study, and applying research methods to a proposed study. More details on the paper will be provided early in the semester. You will turn in the paper in stages (synopsis, first draft, and final draft) throughout the semester.

The choice of topic for the paper should be one that will advance your research and professional interests. The basic requirement is a proposal for a theory-based study or professional project. However, **if you are a PhD student beyond your first year (or if you already have solid background in theory and methods), you are strongly encouraged to use the class as an opportunity to propose a study and to carry out as much of it as you can within the semester.** You should then submit the paper to conference, and ideally later to journal. Communication conference deadlines that fall around the end of the semester are early November for ICA and early December for AEJMC Southeast Colloquium. In the spring, other possibilities are late March for National Communication Association, and early April for AEJMC. Alternative projects meeting special needs and interests of graduate students may also be proposed with my prior approval.

1. **Paper Synopsis: (5%)** 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.

2. **First draft (15%):** This assignment is designed so I can give you feedback on what you've accomplished around mid-semester. If you're doing a literature review for your thesis, you should include as far as you've gotten on:
 - a. Introduction to your topic: Background of the topic; why do we care?; what is the purpose of this paper?
 - b. Critical assessment of relevant literature related to your topic: Definitions of key concepts; What have others discussed?; Similarities and differences among literatures; Critical assessment means your voice and perspective while reviewing others' works
 - c. Research questions and/or Hypotheses: Based on literature review above, what are the questions your study asks? Justify why these questions/hypotheses matter?

You may access copies of completed thesis projects and traditional research theses through the Park Library website. For PhD students or anyone planning to submit a conference paper, you may include outline the methods section, including proposed study design, measures, analysis plan, etc.

3. **Final paper (25%):** This assignment is the full proposal. Revise and elaborate your paper based on comments I made on the first draft and add a preliminary method chapter in detail.
4. **Final paper presentation (5%):** This assignment is designed to give you practice presenting in a conference-style format and to receive feedback on your work.
5. **Discussion leader (10%):** You are leading class discussion based on the article assigned. After a brief presentation (15 minutes) in class, you will lead class discussion.
6. **Discussion questions (10%):** Prior to class, you must upload two questions at Sakai-Forum from the readings that are meant to start a discussion in class. 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. You need to consider the broader implications of the research.
7. **Exam (20%):** This exam covers key concepts and explanations from class readings.

8. **Class participation (10%):** This is a graduate seminar, which means everybody plays every class period! Please keep up with the readings and engage during discussions, etc.

Course Schedule

The following is a tentative outline of topics over the course of the semester and is subject to change.

Week 1 (August 23): Course Orientation

Week 2 (August 30): Fundamentals of Social Science

Week 3 (September 6): Research Paper Meeting/Paper Synopsis Due (Sep 5)

Week 4 (September 13): Public Relations Models

Grunig, J. E. (2006). Furnishing the edifice: Ongoing research on public relations as a strategic management function. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18, 151-176.

Cancel, A. E., Cameron, G. T., Sallot, L. M., & Mitrook, M. A. (1997). It depends: A contingency theory of accommodation in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9, 31-64.

Lee, S. (2012). Co-acculturation in multinational organizations. In G. M. Broom & B. Sha, *Cultip & Center's Effective public relations*, 11th ed. (p. 220). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Week 5 (September 20): Defining Publics

Kim, J. N., & Grunig, J. E. (2011). Problem solving and communicative action: A situational theory of problem solving. *Journal of Communication*, 61, 120-149.

Hallahan, K. (2000). Inactive publics: The forgotten publics in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 26, 499-515.

Week 6 (September 27): Focusing Relationship

Broom, G. M., Casey, S., & Ritchey, J. (1997). Toward a concept and theory of organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9, 83-98.

Kim, Y. (2002). Searching for the organizational-public relationship: A valid and reliable instrument. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(4), 799-815.

Week 7 (October 4): Organizational Listening/Rumor Psychology

Neill, M. S., & Bowen, S. A. (2021). Employee perceptions of ethical listening in the U.S. organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 47, 102123.

Difonzo, N., & Bordia, P. (2000). How top PR professionals handle hearsay: Corporate rumors, their effects, and strategies to manage them. *Public Relations Review*, 26, 173-190.

Week 8 (October 11): International Public Relations/Public Diplomacy

Gaither, T. K., & Curtin, P. A. (2008). Examining the heuristic value of models of international public relations practice: A case study of the Arla Foods crisis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20, 115-137. Dana

Lee, S. (2007). International public relations as a predictor of prominence of US news coverage. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 158-165.

Manheim, J. B., & Albritton, R. B. (1984). Changing national images: International public relations and media agenda setting. *The American Political Science Review*, 78, 641-657.

Week 9 (October 18): Effectiveness of Public Relations First Draft Due

Hon, L. C. (1997). What have you done for me lately? Exploring effectiveness in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9, 1-30.

Kim, Y. (2001). Measuring the economic value of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13, 3-26.

Lee, S., & Yoon, Y. (2010). The return on investment (ROI) of international public relations: A country-level analysis. *Public Relations Review*, 36, 15-20.

Week 10 (October 25): Corporate Social Responsibility

David, P., Kline, S., & Dai, Y. (2005). Corporate social responsibility practices, corporate identity, and purchase intention. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17, 291-313.

Hall, M. R. (2006). Corporate philanthropy and corporate community relations: Measuring relationship-building results. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18, 1-21.

Week 11 (November 1): Meeting with instructor

Week 12 (November 8): Public Relations in Digital Age

Galloway, C., & Swiatek, L. (2018). Public relations and artificial intelligence: It's not (just) about robots. *Public Relations Review*, 44, 734-740.

Briones, R. L., Kuch, B., Liu, B. F., & Jin, Y. (2011). Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 37-43.

Week 13 (November 15): Exam

Week 14 (November 22): No Class (Thanksgiving)

Week 15 (November 29): Crisis Communication and Reputation Management

Plessis, C. (2018). Social media crisis communication: Enhancing a discourse of renewal through dialogic content. *Public Relations Review*, 44, 829-838.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 252-257.

Holtzhausen, D. R., & Roberts, G. F. (2009). An investigation into the role of image repair theory in strategic conflict management. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21, 165-186.

Week 16 (December 6): Paper presentations

Final Paper Due: December 11 (M), Monday by 3 pm