Master's in Strategic Public Relations

PSPR 6202: Advanced Writing for Communications Professionals

3 Credits

Instructor Information

Instructor: Kathleen Colvert

Kathleen Colvert is a former Naval Officer with experience in international diplomatic outreach events, researching and editing defense policy revisions and classroom instruction. Throughout her operational career, she served aboard five naval warships and completed three overseas deployments. She served as primary staff researcher in the government relations office of the American Society of Clinical Pathologists (ASCP). While at ASCP, Kathleen was a contributing author to the organization newsletter to over 100,000 members. She authored Congressional testimony for the Subcommittee of Public Health and Education to garner support for increased funding for allied health grants. Her work with analyte specific reagents was published in Laboratory Medicine.

Kathleen earned her Master's degree in strategic public relations from The George Washington University in 2009 and a bachelor's degree in International Affairs from The George Washington University in 2001. You can learn more about Kathleen by visiting her LinkedIn profile at: www.linkedin.com/in/katcolvert.

Contact Information

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Office Hours: By appointment only. Please request via email.

Course Details

Course Description and Overview

With real-life professional assignments that include a major e-portfolio project that has proven successful to students in advancing their careers, this course is designed to prepare you to become an effective communicator for both strategic public relations and political management.

It emphasizes clear and accurate writing and presentation skills for targeted audiences including the media, clients, campaigns and the general public. The course seeks to lay the foundation of sound writing by using a building block method of having to do increasingly challenging weekly assignments that culminate in completion of a major course portfolio that is expected to be a model of how to run a campaign. Weekly discussions and required readings from the textbooks and other sources will form an important part of the course to ensure that you are aware of issues that impact your professional work. The course will use breaking news developments when possible as a vehicle to focus on professional issues facing public relations and political management professionals. You will begin your major course e-portfolio assignment in Week One and develop it in consultation with your teaching assistant with feedback from your classmates. These portfolios have helped students get hired for new jobs as professional communicators.

Course Learning Objectives

After participating in this course, you will be able to:

1. Compose effective public relations and public affairs communications, including news releases, newsletters, op-ed articles, and speeches, for a variety of targeted audiences.

2. Evaluate the accuracy of information and support an argument with verifiable evidence.

3. Evaluate writing to identify holes in logic or unanswered questions.

4. Explain the ethical and legal issues facing public relations and public affairs professionals today.

5. Demonstrate knowledge of editing, including correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

6. Write in the style specified by The Associated Press Stylebook.

7. Articulate the role of journalists and how to gain their trust and meet their requirements.

Program Learning Objectives

Upon the completion of the Masters in SPR, students will have obtained an enhanced understanding and skills in:

1. Fundamentals of effective, strategic communications;
2. Best practices for writing, media relations and strategic communications planning and implementation;
3. Leadership in communications on a sound ethical and financial basis;
4. Managing the implementation of strategic communications strategies.

Graduate School Expectations

Students enrolled in a graduate program should take their academic responsibilities seriously and be prepared to meet the following expectations:

1. Utilize effective time management skills so as to complete and submit their assignments on their required due dates and times.

2. Have attained a mastery of written communication skills including proper sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and word usage.
3. Understand how to properly format in-text citations and references for resources and information integrated into their written assignments.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW's online course evaluation system. It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting:

Lawrence Parnell
Director, Strategic Public Relations Program
lparnell@gwu.edu

Suzanne Farrand
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM
sfarrand@gwu.edu | 202-994-9309

Required Text and Learning Materials

- Bivins, Thomas H. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format*, 8th edition. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, ISBN: 978-0073526232.

- Guth, David; Marsh, Charles & Poovey Short, Bonnie. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More*, 3rd edition. Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, MA. ISBN: 978-0205031979.

- *The Associated Press Stylebook*, (2020-2022 edition). Associated Press. ISBN-978-1-5416-4757-2.

Note: Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard on a timely basis during the semester. It is your responsibility to check Blackboard regularly to access these additional materials.

Evaluation and Grading

This course will include the types of assessments listed in the table below. Descriptions of each assessment can be found on Blackboard. Over the 10 weeks of this course, you will produce individual communications assets common to public relations campaigns. Each week, you will have the benefit of having your classmates' and the instructor's feedback on your non-graded drafts. At the end of the course, you will present a proofed and edited final version of your early drafts for your grade. This process will allow you to practice your editing and proofing skills on your work and the work of your classmates whilst also allowing you the flexibility to experiment with your writing on your first drafts.

Discussions will require you to apply newly gained knowledge to current events and real-world examples of public relations methods and activities.

Assessments will contribute toward the student's grade based on the following chart:

Assignment Category	Weight
First draft	0%
Final Writing e-portfolio	50%
Written submissions	15%

Class discussions	20%
Portfolio peer participation	15%
Total	*100%*

Course Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar. Final dates and details will be found on the Blackboard course site.

Week	Topic	Lessons	Readings	Assignments Due
1	Introduction & Planning Your Message	Lesson 1.1: Essentials of Writing	Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - Ch. 1 Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* - pp 1-10 - Appendix B, "A Concise Guide to Grammar" on pp. 248–252	Discussion 1.1: Personal Bio Discussion 1.2: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 1.1: Messaging Map
2	Foundations of Strategic Writing	Lesson 2.1: Strategic Writing, Part 1 Lesson 2.2: Strategic Writing, Part 2 Lesson 2.3: Publicity & Writing Pitches	Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - Ch. 3 & 4 Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing:*	Discussion 2.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 2.1: Pitching a Proposal

			Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More - pp. 30–33 and 65–69	
3	Working with the Media: Writing News Releases	Lesson 3.1: Writing News Releases Lesson 3.2: Creating a Media Kit	Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - Ch. 5 & 7 Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* - pp 41-64 and 76-86	Discussion 3.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 3.1: Organization Backgrounder & Executive Bio
4	Working with the Media: Ethics & Trust	Lesson 4.1: Ethics and Trust	Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - Ch. 2 & 8 Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* - pp 26–29 and 34–36	Discussion 4.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 4.1: Press Release and Photo Op
5	Writing News Features	Lesson 5.1: The Basics of News Features	Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More*	Discussion 5.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 5.1: News Feature

			- pp 54–55	
6	Writing Op-Eds	Lesson 6.1: The Basics of Op-Eds	Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* - pp 87–94 Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - pp 175-228 The following readings are written by David Shipley, the former op-ed editor of The New York Times: And Now a Word from Op-ed. Editing an Op-ed How to Submit an Op-ed	Discussion 6.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 6.1: Op-Eds Assignment 6.2: Media Room Critique
7	Writing for Social Media	Lesson 7.1: Effective Writing Techniques for Online Content Lesson 7.2: Writing Content for Facebook and Twitter When Social Media Became News	Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - Ch. 6 Note the sections on Writing for Web Sites (pp. 93–94), Writing Blog Posts (pp. 98–99), and How to Write Twitter Posts (pp. 102–103). Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011)	Discussion 7.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 7.1: Blog Post & Social Media Promotion Assignment 7.2: Blog Critique

			Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More - pp 16–20 and 105–119 Read "Why Twitter Matters for Media Organizations" by Alan Rusbridger, editor-in-chief of the Guardian newspaper of London. Read The Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism published its annual State of the Media on June 15, 2016..	
8	Writing Speeches	Lesson 8.1: Writing Speeches	Bivins, T. (2013) *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* - Ch. 11 Guth, D., Marsh, C., & Poovey S. B. (2011) *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* - pp 99-104	Discussion 8.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 8.1: Speech
9	Internal Communications	Lesson 9.1: Employee Communication from Organization Leader	Read "Communications in mergers: The glue that holds everything together"	Discussion 9.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 9.1: Employee Communication from Organization Leader

			Read "The Moment of Truth for Internal Communications" Read: "How to Promote Company Culture Through Internal Communications"	
10	Portfolio	None	None	Discussion 10.1: Issues in Public Relations and Political Communications Assignment 10.1: Final Portfolio & Cover Letter

Expectations and Responsibilities

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site regularly throughout the semester to review weekly course content, view announcements, and submit assignments. Students can access the course site through GWU Blackboard.

Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or the IT Blackboard web page.

Please note that your access to this course on Blackboard will continue for one month after the course ends. If you wish to keep any work or materials, you must download or save them before the course closes.

Technology Requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate in this course. The minimum technology requirements for learning online at GW are outlined on the Technical Requirements and Support web page.

If you have any problems with the technology in this course, you can seek technological support from GW in a variety of ways, outlined on the IT Support website.

GW is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment that is accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The following links provide more information about the accessibility of technologies that may be used in this course:

- Blackboard accessibility
- Microsoft Office accessibility

- [Adobe accessibility](#)
- [Vimeo accessibility](#)
- [YouTube accessibility](#)
- [VoiceThread accessibility](#)
- [Webex accessibility](#)

If you have any issues regarding the accessibility of the technology used in this course, please contact your instructor. You may also explore the [Disability Support Services](#) website.

Technology Expectations

Regarding technology skills, you should be able to:

- Create documents and presentation slides
- Use a webcam and microphone
- Use a digital camera or scanner
- Upload files, including recordings and images
- Be open to learning and registering for new technologies
- Be flexible when technological glitches happen (which is a given)
- Seek technological help when necessary by contacting the Division of Information Technology

If you have any problems with the technology expectations in this course, please contact your instructor.

Getting Started

Everything you need to get started in the course is contained within the Blackboard course site. You can use the menu links on the left side panel to view different components. The content for each learning unit is divided into folders—one for each week. More unit folders will unlock as weeks in the course progress.

Participation Policy

All students are expected to learn and contribute by being a positive participant in discussions, activities, presentations, and assignments. If you have an unavoidable conflict or become ill, in a way that will affect your participation in a given week, please notify your instructor immediately.

Communication & Feedback

Important announcements will be posted periodically via Blackboard's announcement feature throughout the course. The instructor will strive to reply to student questions within 24 hours and provide feedback for assignments within a week after the due date.

Grading Scale

Following is the grade scale for all CPS classes:

Grade	Range	Grade Standard
A	94-100	Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work.

A-	90-93	Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work.
B+	87-89	Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work.
B	83-86	Good work, but needs reworking and more effort.
B-	80-82	You've completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements.
C+	77-79	Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern.
C	73-76	Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern.
C-	70-72 (lowest grade to pass)	Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc.
F	Below 70	Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment.

Netiquette

Please observe the following rules of netiquette for communicating online:

- Remain professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.
- Remember that a real human being wrote each post and will read what you write in response. It is easy to misinterpret discussion posts. Let's give the benefit of the doubt.
- If you have a strong opinion on a topic, it is acceptable to express it as long as it is not phrased as an attack. Please be gracious with differing opinions.
- When upset, wait a day or two prior to posting. Messages posted (or emailed) in anger are often regretted later.
- Proofread and use the spell check tool when you type a post. It makes the post easier to read and helps your readers understand what you are saying.

Your instructor reserves the right to delete any post that is deemed inappropriate for the discussion forum, blog, or wiki without prior notification to the student. This includes any post containing language that is offensive, rude, profane, racist, or hateful. Posts that are seriously off-topic or serve no purpose other than to vent frustration will also be removed.

Credit Hour Policy

For this **10-week, 3-credit course** there will be an average of **9-10 hours** of combined direct instruction and independent learning per week. More information about GWU's credit hour policy can be found at the Office of the Provost's Policies web page (Under: Assignment of Credit Hour Policy).

University Policies & Services

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly,

engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university, including a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the Office of Academic Integrity website, email (rights@gwu.edu), or call (202-994-6757).

Copyright Statement

Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, course materials, class discussions, and examinations are created for and expected to be used by class participants only. The recording and rebroadcasting of such material, by any means, is forbidden.

The Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. § 10) governs the rights attributed to owners of copyrighted work. Under certain circumstances, educational institutions may provide copies of copyrighted works to students. The copies may not be copied nor used for any other purpose besides private study, scholarship, or research. Users should not provide electronic copies of any materials provided on this course's Blackboard site to unauthorized users. If a user fails to comply with Fair Use restrictions, he/she may be held liable for copyright infringement. No further transmission or electronic distribution is permitted.

Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Please contact Disability Support Services if you need additional accommodations for accessing electronic course materials.

University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

Students must notify faculty as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls in the first three weeks of class, the student must inform the faculty within the first week of the semester that they are enrolled in the course.

To the greatest extent possible, faculty must continue to extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.

Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday must arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities.

For the full text of the policy and calendar of religious holidays, please see the Office of the Provost's Policies web page (Religious Holidays document).

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services. They can be contacted by phone at 202-994-8250 or in person at Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information visit the Disability Support Services website.

Counseling and Psychological Services

GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information call 202-994-5300 or visit the Counseling and Psychological Services website.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in Gelman Library at 2130 H St NW in Suite 221 and they can be reached at 202-994-3765 or via email at gwriter@gwu.edu. You can schedule writing center appointments, both in-person or by phone, in advance. Daytime and evening hours are available. Check for this semester's hours at the writing center contact page. The Writing Center does offer Summer hours.

GWU Libraries

Off campus students have full access to all of the research resources, services, and assistance that the Library offers. The GW community has access to 500+ online subscription databases and to millions of items, electronic and print, in the library catalog.   Off-campus students even have additional privileges because the Library will FedEx print materials to your home. For more information visit the GW Libraries homepage.

Call the Ask Us desk at 202-994-6048 or contact someone at the library to answer any questions. For questions beyond "Do you have this book/article?" and "How do I login?" use the website mentioned to make a research consultation appointment with a librarian. Librarians are there to guide students through any aspect of the research process, from selecting and narrowing a topic, crafting a research strategy to citation management.

Safety and Security

- **In an emergency**: call GWPD at 202-994-6111 or call 911
- **For situation-specific actions**: review the Emergency Response Handbook
- **In an active violence situation**: Get Out, Hide Out or Take Out
- **Stay informed**: review notification tools for staying informed during emergency and safety related situations