

# PUR 4442 Public Interest Communications

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[Course Schedule](#) of Discussions, Readings and Assignments

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## **Course Overview**

Effective communication is an accelerant on the fire of social change. Public interest communications is a form of strategic communication through which organizations, causes or movements take on specific communications objectives that will result in a change that benefits society. This benefit transcends the particular interest of any single organization undertaking a campaign or communications effort.

This is an evolving field, and its practitioners are continuously applying new insights and techniques to support positive social change. The field is not as well-established as its sister fields of public relations, advertising, journalism and marketing; however, an increased recognition among change makers of the importance of communications to social change means that more resources are available than there once were. This is also an entrepreneurial field, which results in significant innovation.

Public interest communications is a large and complex field, and it will not be possible to cover all its aspects during the semester we have together. To make the most of our time, the course will focus on the principles and fundamentals of the field.

In this course, you will learn the six spheres through which we can drive social change, the strategic planning process for an effective social change communications campaign, and the tools, qualities and tactics that make these campaigns real. You will gain insight into the richness of the field, the power that effective communications has to address a problem and profoundly affect the lives of people, and begin to see the astonishing range of careers and opportunities that this field holds.

## **Course Objectives**

### **After completing this course:**

1. You will be able to describe the role of communication in driving positive social change.
2. You will be able to critique strategic communications plans for social change efforts.
3. You will understand and be able to apply a set of frameworks that are built on social, behavioral and cognitive science.
4. You will be able to articulate a theory of change.
5. You will be able to determine how to use and combine the six spheres through which communicators work to achieve change: policy, media, social norms, the market, activism and communities of influence.
6. You will be able to develop communications strategies that allow you to concentrate scarce resources where they can make the biggest difference.
7. You can identify meaningful evaluative measures rooted in observable goals and meaningful calls to action.
8. You will learn the role of secondary and primary research in designing public interest campaigns and how to design research plans that inform successful campaigns.
9. You will be able to critique campaign design and results.
10. You will develop skills to interpret and incorporate fundamental changes in how we communicate as a society and their implications for this field.
11. You will learn the role of stories and narratives in social change efforts.
12. You will gain an ethical framework guiding your decision-making as you design efforts that drive change.

## **Course Format**

Our course will include brief lectures, discussion, reflection, exercises, guest lectures, a midterm exam and student presentations.

## **Required Reading, Viewing and Listening**

Writing, reading, viewing and listening assignments are listed on the syllabus. There is no textbook for this course. I may add readings and assignments over the course of the semester.

## **College of Journalism and Communications Objectives**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that by graduation, all students should be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in 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 communications.
- 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.
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods 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
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style, and grammatical correctness.
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work and to understand the digital world.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

Your grade will be based on your performance in four major areas, each of which constitutes a proportion of the final grade. Your grade will be calculated by the following:

### **1. In-Class Attendance & Participation: 20%**

Attendance and active participation are mandatory. Absences count from the first class following drop/add. After due warning, I may prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a lower or failing grade for excessive absences. Since our class meets just once a week for three hours, more than one unexcused absence during the semester will be considered “excessive absences.” You are responsible for notifying me before your absence and, if it is due to illness, provide a note from your medical provider.

Participation means you are fully engaged in the classroom discussion, and not using cell phones or laptops except when directed to as part of classroom activities. It means you arrive to class early or on time, ready to learn and engage.

Requirements for assignments and other work in this course follow [UF policies](#).

### **2. Assignments: 25%**

The class will include readings, videos, podcasts et al., and there will be written assignments for some of them. You are required to complete these assignments at the direction of the instructor. These in-class assignments may not be made up if you miss class.

### **3. Case Study: 30%**

You will write and present a complete case study of an organization working to make a specific change and offer recommendations for how that organization might have taken a different approach that would have been more effective. You will present your case to the class.

### **4. Midterm Exam 15%**

### **5. Final Reflection 10%**

This written or recorded reflection will give you an opportunity to share what you have learned this semester. This is due Monday, December 9.

## **I WILL NOT ACCEPT LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

### **The grading scale for the course is:**

A 92-100%

A- 90-91.99%

B+ 88-89.99%

B 82-87.99.99%

B- 80-81.99%

C+ 78-79.99%

C 72-77.99%

C- 70-71.99%

D+ 68-69.99%

D 62-67.99%

D- 60-61.99%

E below 60.99%

### **Availability**

Please come talk with me about any questions or concerns you have during my office hours or by appointment. (You can also reach me by email, and I'll do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.)

### **Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

I'm committed to creating an environment of inclusion and belonging that respects and affirms the fundamental dignity, value, and distinctiveness of all individuals and their perspectives. My teaching will reflect the understanding of the complexity of identity and the mutuality of our global community. It is my responsibility to help promote and maintain a community of compassion, embracing the rich depths of diversity while facilitating opportunities for equity and inclusion.

## **Students Requiring Accommodations**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [dso.ufl.edu/drc](http://dso.ufl.edu/drc)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

## **Course Evaluation**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback professionally and respectfully is available at [gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/](http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/).

Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/](http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/)

## **University Honesty Policy**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied:

“On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code ([sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/](http://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with me.

## **CAMPUS RESOURCES**

## **U Matter, We Care**

If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [umatter.ufl.edu/](http://umatter.ufl.edu/) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

## **Counseling and Wellness Center**

Visit [counseling.ufl.edu/](http://counseling.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services. Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit [shcc.ufl.edu/](http://shcc.ufl.edu/).

## **University Police Department**

Visit [police.ufl.edu/](http://police.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies). UF Health Shands

## **Emergency Room / Trauma Center**

For immediate medical care call 352-733- 0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center](http://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center).

## **E-learning Technical Support**

Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

## **Hitchcock Field and Fork Pantry**

Field and Fork provides food at no charge to any member of the UF community. Their hours are posted here: <https://pantry.fieldandfork.ufl.edu/>

## **Career Connections Center**

Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services [career.ufl.edu/](http://career.ufl.edu/). Library Support: [cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask](http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask) various ways to receive

assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. [teachingcenter.ufl.edu/](http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/) Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. [writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/](http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/) Student Complaints On-Campus: [sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-](http://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code) code student-conduct

## **A Note on Recording**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

## **Land Acknowledgement**

I acknowledge that for thousands of years, the area now comprising the state of Florida has been, and continues to be, home to many Native Nations. I also recognize that the main campus of the University of Florida is located on the ancestral territory of the Potano and the Seminole peoples. The Potano, of Timucua affiliation, lived here in the



Alachua region from before European arrival until the destruction of their towns in the early 1700s. The Seminole, also known as the Alachua Seminole, established towns here shortly after but were forced from the land as a result of a series of wars with the United States known as the Seminole Wars. I acknowledge our shared obligation to honor the past, present, and future Native residents and cultures of Florida.

### **Guidelines for Assignment Grades:**

Assignments that receive As:

- Draw on the frameworks you've learned in class
- Are interesting
- Compare favorably with the best examples of work I share in class
- Are clearly organized
- Rely heavily on stories and visual language
- Are free of grammatical, spelling, fact, or typographical errors
- Show an understanding of both the lecture and the assignment
- Include strong transitions
- Are concise but complete—not overwritten or puffy, but include relevant messages and information
- Are consistent with your message
- Are free of fact errors
- Meticulously cite source materials
- Where appropriate, include 5 or more credible sources of information
- Encourage me to keep reading with use of flow and narrative
- Are truthful and accurate
- Demonstrate a strong understanding of the client and their needs, as well as an understanding of issues and opposition the client faces
- Clearly support arguments with research

### **Points Off:**

I take 2 points off for each of the following:

- Grammatical, spelling or typographical errors
- AP style errors
- Badly organized paragraphs
- Puffy language

I take 10 points off for:

- Misspellings of your organization's name, or any proper name
- Missing citations
- Fact errors
- Using the wrong format
- Failing to include or address something I specifically request in an assignment
- Not using page numbers

Papers will receive an F if:

- They are late
- They don't include necessary citations
- They are generated by using ChatGPT or other AI Tools
- There is evidence of plagiarism

# Class Discussion and Assignment Schedule

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| <b>Week One: An Introduction to Public Interest Communications</b><br><b>August 26</b><br><i>Discussion Topics:</i><br>Introductions<br>What is public interest communication?<br>What are your causes?<br>Course expectations |  |
| <b>Framework 1: The Essential Elements of Public Interest Communications</b>   |  |
| Classroom Activity: Make your name tag   |  |

## Assignment 1: “My Purpose”

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| <b>Week Two: Build the World You Wish Existed</b><br><b>September 9</b><br><i>Discussion Topics:</i><br>What is systems thinking and why is it important to public interest communication?<br>What is human-centered design, and how does it lead us to better work? |                                    |
| <b>Framework 2: Build the World You Wish Existed–Using Systems Thinking and Human-Centered Design to Find the Most Solvable Part of a Problem</b>  |                                    |
| Classroom Activities: Identifying the elements in a system, the five whys, applying human-centered design  | Listening: “The Sum of Us” Podcast |

**Week Three: The Science of What Makes People Care**  
**September 16**

*Discussion Topics:*

Abandoning the information deficit model

Why awareness fails us

The role of theories of change and how to write one

**Framework 3: The Science of What Makes People Care—What Social, Behavioral and Cognitive Science Teach Us About Engaging People in Causes**

Classroom Activities: Communicating visually, finding connections

Assigned Reading for Class:  
“Stop Raising Awareness Already”  
“The Science of What Makes People Care”

**Assignment 2: “Awareness days, but make it matter”**

**Week Four: The Spheres of Influence**  
**September 23**

*Discussion Topics:*

Identifying the spheres through which change happens: media, policy, communities of influence, activism, industry, and social norms

**Framework 4: The Six Spheres of Influence**

Classroom Activities: Six spheres scavenger hunt, sharing our stories, Choosing your topic for your case analysis and forming groups

Assigned Reading for Class:  
“Meet the Six Spheres”

**Week Five: Exploring the Six Spheres–Media, Policy and Communities of Influence**

**September 30**

*Discussion Topics:*

How change happens in each sphere

Mapping each sphere for your issue

Classroom Activities: Mapping each sphere for your topic

Guest Speaker: Aubrey Nagle (invited)

**Week Six: Exploring the Six Spheres–Activism, Social Norms and Industry**

**October 7**

*Discussion Topics:*

How change happens in each sphere

Mapping each sphere for your issue

Learning how the spheres affect each other

Review for midterm assessment

Classroom Activities: Mapping each sphere for your topic, mapping how action in one sphere might create pressure or outcomes in another

Review for Midterm assessment

Guest Speaker: Bobby Jones, “Good is the New Cool”

**Week Eight: Hooray! It's Midterm Assessment DAY!**  
**October 14**

Classroom Activity: Midterm Assessment

Bring your favorite writing pens

**Week Nine: Doing Less With More**  
**October 21**

*Discussion Topics:*

Doing less with more: concentrating your resources where they can make the greatest difference

**Framework 5: Back-of-the-Envelope Strategy**

Classroom Activities: Complete your Back-of-the-Envelope Strategy

*Assigned reading for class:*  
Actors, Not Audiences  
The Four-Question Guide to Strategy

Guest Speaker: TBA

**Assignment 3: Your Back-of-the-Envelope Strategy**

**Week 10: Storybuilding**  
**October 28**

*Discussion Topics:*

The science behind compelling, unforgettable and inspiring stories that drive change and lead to narrative shifts. Finding your stories, An ethical framework for finding and sharing stories, Storytelling and data

**Framework 6: Storybuilding**

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| Classroom Activities: Identifying dominant and counter-narratives for your issue<br><br>Finding Our Stories worksheet | <i>Assigned reading for class:</i><br>The Science of Story Building<br>Fixing Data's Demand Problem<br>Washington Post "A Hidden Threat" |
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| <p><b>Week 11: Measuring Change and Creating Meaningful Calls to Action</b><br/> <b>November 4</b><br/> <i>Discussion Topics:</i><br/> Measuring Change: Aligning your theory of change, goals, calls to action, measurement and evaluation.<br/> Input and output measures that matter</p> |  |
| Classroom Activities:   | <i>Assigned reading for class:</i><br>Give your calls to action a makeover |

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| <p><b>Week 12: Making Unforgettable Presentations, Building Your Career in Public Interest Communications</b><br/> <b>November 18</b></p> |  |
| Classroom activities: How to write and deliver a TED-style talk   |  |

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| <p><b>Week 13: Final Presentations</b></p> |   |
|  | Assigned reading: Giving and receiving feedback |

