

December 21, 2024

Spring 2025 SYLLABUS: Corporate Communication Essentials (🔧) PUR 4204 (21600)

Professor: Patrick Ford, Professional-in-Residence, Department of Public Relations

Course Time: Tuesday 10:40 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.; Thursday 10:40 – 11:30 a.m.

Location: Weimer 2050

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:00-2:00 p.m.; Wednesday 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

On Zoom -- Appointments recommended and are also available outside office hours.

Contact Information -- Email: fordp@ufl.edu; phone 352-293-0493; text: 703-966-8138

Teaching Assistant: Taylor Morales (taylor.morales@ufl.edu)

Messages via Canvas are accepted.

Course Description

This course focuses on why successful communication professionals – whether they are in for-profit or nonprofit corporations; whether they are in-house or on the agency side; and whether they aspire to creative or management roles – must develop a fundamental understanding of business.

- How does your company and/or your client generate revenue and profits?
- How do companies report their financial results and other so-called “material information,” and what are the regulatory requirements for financial disclosure for publicly traded companies vs. private companies vs. nonprofit companies?
- Do you know what a balance sheet is and why it and other financial reports are significant?
- How does your company engage with key stakeholders (such as employees, customers, suppliers, investors, and communities in which they operate)?
- Why do successful corporations focus on corporate reputation, corporate purpose, mission, vision, values, and on commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) policies (including diversity, equity, and inclusion)?
- How does the board of directors oversee and interact with senior management?
- How does the chief communication officer in successful corporations interact with the chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operating officer, general counsel, chief human resources officer, chief information officer, chief marketing officer, and other members of the so-called c-suite?
- How and why should strategic communication professionals develop international business acumen?

Over the course of this semester, we will delve into these and various other aspects of corporate communication with special emphasis on why they matter and what role tomorrow’s strategic communication professionals must play in ensuring the enduring success of the enterprise. We will examine a wide range of specific corporate examples and, in some cases, hear from senior communication executives on how they and their companies engage with their various stakeholders (employees, suppliers, investors, customers, communities, governments, media, social media influencers, and other key opinion leaders).

Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will:

- Develop basic business acumen and learn how to relate that to their role as strategic communicators
- Develop an understanding of stakeholder theory
- Learn about the changing role of corporations in modern society and how the role of public relations also is evolving
- Learn the basics of corporate financial communication, financial disclosure laws and regulation, and investor relations
- Learn the basics of corporate purpose, corporate social responsibility and ESG (environmental, social and governance)
- Develop a deeper understanding of employee and other stakeholder engagement

Prerequisite:

- PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes**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:

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences, and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style, and grammatical correctness.
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

Readings**Required Book**

- *Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer*, by Matthew W. Ragas and Ron Culp. Emerald Publishing, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-83867-662-9 (paperback)

Recommended Book

- *Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: The Workbook*, by Matthew W. Ragas and Ron Culp. Emerald Publishing, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-83797-085-8 (paperback)

Additional Readings as Assigned

Students will be expected to be regular readers of free updates from selected business sites. Specific links to key newsletters and reports will be provided by the professor. These include “CEO Daily” “CFO Daily” from *Fortune* and “PRWeek Daily Breakfast Briefing” from *PRWeek*. **Note: *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *PRWeek* are accessible to UF students through the UF George A. Smathers Libraries online database system.** Generally, assigned readings (book chapters or other articles) in the syllabus should be read in advance of the class for which they are listed. **Be prepared for the professor to call on you in that class to discuss the assigned readings.**

Online Course Administration — e-Learning in Canvas

<https://elearning.ufl.edu> will be used to administer the course communication, materials (e.g., PowerPoint files, additional readings, handouts, assignment guidelines, evaluation forms), and grades. For instance, an electronic file of this document is posted on Canvas. You can access the site by using your GatorLink username and password. Please check the site for announcements and/or threads of comments from classmates, and the professor.

Course Professionalism

- The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school, and professional decorum is expected at all times. Therefore, the students, and the professor, adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction. Carefully consider how you participate in class discussions and in the assignments you submit and present. You can use humor and demonstrate creativity but think ahead to how it will reflect on you. Use your best professional judgment. Projects should not contain nudity, profanity, illegal activities, or situations that would put you or others in danger.
- Students are expected to arrive in class on time and not leave early unless prior permission is granted. *Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade (25% of grade) and be sure to show up and speak up as appropriate.*
- Students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates and the professor.

Special Statement

Your experience in this class is important to me. I embrace a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along several dimensions, including race, ethnicity, and national origins, gender, and gender identity, socioeconomic class, disability, age, and religion. It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for others.

Course Grades

Grading factors include:

Attendance 10%

- Attendance is mandatory. Absences count from the first session following drop/add. Excessive unexcused absences during the semester will cause a reduction in credit for attendance and participation. **You are responsible for notifying the instructor prior to missing class or as soon as possible afterwards in an emergency.** Requirements for assignments and other work in this course follow UF policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Active Participation: 15%

- Active participation in class discussion is required to gain full points; your physical presence is not in itself enough. To receive full credit, you must demonstrate active engagement, which means showing up on time, and being fully present (camera on) and prepared to make comments or ask questions as appropriate.

Case Study Assignments: 25%

- Students will be assigned to small groups to explore various aspects of business acumen and corporate communication essentials and prepare case studies, which will be presented in class.

Quizzes: 50%

- Quizzes will be designed to test the students' understanding of key concepts of corporate communication essentials addressed in the course textbook and/or in supplemental readings, and those discussed in class by the professor and/or guest lecturers.

Grading for the course follows current UF grading policies for assigning grade points (see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A = 93.0-100%.

A- = 90.0-92.99%. B+ = 87.0-89.99%. B = 83.0-86.99%. B- = 80.0-82.99%. C+ = 77.0-79.99%.

C = 74.0-76.99%. C- = 70.0-73.99%. D+ = 67.0-69.99%. D = 64.0-66.99%. D- = 60.0-63.99%. E = below 60%

Further information about grades and grading policy may be found at this [link to the university grades and grading policies](#).

Online Course Evaluations

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 in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://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 <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

The Honor Pledge

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 specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code](#). 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 the instructor or TA in this class.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness Resources

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) 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 the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- *University Police Department*: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) 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; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.](#)

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support:* Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- *Career Connections Center:* Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- *Library Support:* 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 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- *Writing Studio:* 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- *Student Complaints On-Campus:* [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)
- *On-Line Students Complaints:* [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Policy on Recording Classes

- 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.

Other Important Notes from the Instructor

- In this class I want you to produce all your own work without generative AI's assistance. It is important for me to be able to ascertain what you know and can produce unaided on your own. The use of generative AI for your assignments in this class is a violation of the honor code as you are presenting content as your own that was not fully created by you. There are various AI detection tools available (built within Canvas and externally such as ZeroGPT), and many AI platforms follow very formulaic response patterns. If I am concerned that your work is not your own, I will try to verify the originality of your work and if evidence is found that your work is AI generated, I will submit your assignment as violating the honor code.
- I can be reached via email (fordp@ufl.edu), by telephone or text (703-966-8138). While I always strive to respond in a timely way, please be aware that I may not always be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 24 hours for a response.
- Students are not permitted to bring guests to class unless pre-arranged with Professor Ford or TA Taylor Morales in advance.
- If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, it is crucial that you schedule time with me immediately or as soon as possible. Please feel free to approach me about any concerns or comments you might have about this class. Ideally, every student in the class should plan to have at least one 1:1 meeting with me during the semester – I can meet with you on Zoom during office hours or at other times, but I ask that you reach out in advance and schedule an appointment.
- Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “E” for the course and possible disciplinary action.
- Do not submit the same work to more than one class without prior written permission from both professors. Do not adapt work from another class for this class without my prior written permission.
- Do not adapt someone else's work and submit it as your own. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.
- Spelling counts, as do grammar, punctuation and professional presentation techniques. If you need extra help with presentation skills, arrange an appointment with me.
- An assignment turned in past the deadline may incur a penalty. This is a business where deadlines count.
- In addition to the required and recommended readings, you are expected to maintain comprehensive class notes because class lectures often contain information that is not contained in the readings. You will be quizzed on this information. *If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get briefed by another student on the content covered in the class.*
- Misspelling company or agency names during exercises may result in a point deduction on the grade. Check your work!

Course Schedule

- Detailed course schedule to be provided during first week of classes.
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