

*Syllabus updated November 11, 2014*

**PUR 4932: Public Interest Communications**

Tuesday: 9:35-10:25

Thursday: 9:35-11:30

**Professor Ann Christiano, Frank Karel Chair in Public Interest Communications**

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S/U: NO

**About this Course**

Positive social change is not possible without effective communication. The greatest ideas will languish without a specific effort to engage the right people in those efforts at the right time. Public Interest Communications is a form of public relations through which organizations take on specific communications objectives that will have a benefit to society. This benefit transcends the particular interest of any single organization undertaking a campaign or communications effort.

The skills and qualities of those who work in Public Interest Communications are not unlike those of people who work in public relations. In fact, the fields differ more in purpose than in form: while public relations tends to take on the interests of a single corporation or entity, Public Interest Communications tends to take on causes that affect the health, safety and well-being of a community or population.

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 advertising, journalism and marketing, however, an increased recognition among change makers of the importance of communications to social change means that there are more resources 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 16 weeks we have together. To make the most of our time, the course will focus on the principles and fundamentals on which the field stands.

In this course, you will learn the five 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 to 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 opportunity that this field holds.

This course will give you the opportunity to hear directly from the leading thinkers in public interest communicators, and we will talk with people working in the field frequently. I urge you to take careful notes from these lectures and learn enough about the speakers in advance to add your own well-informed questions to the discussion.

**Course Objectives**

1. You will understand the role of communications in driving positive social change.

2. You will understand the strategic communications planning process.
3. You will understand the four spheres through which communicators work to achieve change: policy, media, social marketing and communities of influence.
4. You will meet and interact with the experts who are leading and defining this field.
5. You will gain new insight to how fundamental changes in how we communicate as a society are changing this field.
6. You will understand the skills and qualities associated with effective communication for social change.

### **Grading**

Your grade will be based on the following:

Class participation:	15%
Mid-term Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	20%
Writing Assignment	5%
Final Assignment and Presentation:	20%
Quizzes:	20%

A	90-100 points
B	80-89 points
C	70-79 points
D	60-69 points
E	Less than 60 points

### **Appointments**

Please stop by during office hours to discuss assignments, materials or other concerns related to the course. You may also schedule a meeting with me via email. My office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus. I'm often in my office, and am always happy to talk with students. Please feel free to pop in, but know that there's no guarantee you'll catch me except during office hours.

### **Course Professionalism**

This College is a professional school, and professional decorum is expected at all times. I expect you to adhere to workplace norms of collegial and respectful interaction and behavior. That specifically means that you will arrive on time, not speak when another student or the instructor are speaking or use cell phones, lap tops or other electronic devices. I expect that you will welcome and treat with respect the diverse perspectives of your fellow students, as will I. Violations of these expectations may result in students being asked to leave class and a lowering of your grade.

### **Students with Special Needs**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must submit a documentation letter to the professor when requesting accommodation. Please notify me at the beginning of the semester if you would like to discuss requests for special provisions.

### **Class Attendance Policy**

Attendance is not required. However, note that your attendance will affect your class participation grade. Participation accounts for 15 percent of your grade. To achieve full credit, you must be present for class and participate. Additionally, I will give surprise quizzes. While quizzes that appear on the syllabus may be made up, surprise quizzes may not be.

### **Academic Honesty**

The work you submit for this course must be your own. It must be original for this course. You must never use direct or paraphrased material from any source, including Web sites, without attribution. You may not submit anything that you wrote for another class, or that you wrote as a volunteer or intern. You may not submit anything that was written for any purpose other than the given assignment. I will handle any incident of academic dishonesty in accordance with the University of Florida policies that address cheating and unethical academic behavior, specifically the UF Honor Code and the Academic Honesty Guidelines.

Any case of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for this course. I will follow University Guidelines for any offense.

In every assignment you complete for this course you will clearly attribute the source of your information, including information obtained from organizations' web sites or internal documents. You cannot copy anything word for word, regardless of the source, without putting quotes around it and attributing the source.

### **Format**

Everything you write for this course must be coherent, logical and carefully edited. Misspellings, syntax and grammatical errors are unacceptable in upper-level college writing, particularly writing by public relations students.

### **Texts**

Dan and Chip Heath "Switch"

Marty Neumeier "The Brand Gap"

Wes Moore “The Other Wes Moore”

“The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways To Use Social Media to Drive Social Change”  
by Jennifer Aaker, Andy Smith, Dan Ariely and Chip Heath

“Short and Sweet” and “See, Say, Feel, Do” both available for free download at [www.fenton.com](http://www.fenton.com)

### **Reaction Paper Assignment**

In 600-1000 words, please tell me about your own interaction with public interest communications.

You have been the target of countless change communications efforts over the course of your life. From when you first watched Sesame Street to your daily walks around campus now, you have been buffeted by messages to help you make "better" decisions or to take action on behalf of a cause.

Tell me about the extent to which your behavior and lifestyle have been affected by a particular campaigns, and whether it stands out as being particularly good or bad. If you have a story about how a specific campaign or message has affected the path of your life, please do include it. While I recognize that you may not have been aware of who organized or funded the campaign at the time, please find that out now and include that in your paper. How does that knowledge affect your perception of the credibility of the campaign?

This is a reaction paper, not a research paper, but please do include citations where appropriate, and share links to things that have been particularly moving--I'm always looking for new things to share. Use the MLA in-text citation method to cite your sources. If you are unfamiliar with this method, a quick Google search will turn up several great sites.

I will grade these on:

- the cohesiveness of your points. Are your comments supported by facts? Have you used examples, is there an overarching structure that makes sense?
- the quality of your writing. Your writing should be free of grammatical errors, typographical errors and other mistakes. Your paper should be well-organized, lively, and interesting.
- the extent to which you reach beyond the mundane in your response.

Please use page numbers and headings, and include footnotes or endnotes.

### **Final Assignment**

For your final assignment, you will identify an organization whose work is related to the issue your group has agreed to tackle, and whose position your group identifies with, and develop a communications strategy on behalf of that organization.

You will present your strategy in the form of a 5-8 page issue brief and a 20-minute presentation.

In your issue brief, you will:

- Describe the organization
- Articulate the organization's position on the issue you've identified.
- List and describe credible organizations who oppose your organization.
- Describe and cite the research that supports your position
- Identify the group's core messages. You may determine that the message the group is using is appropriate to its target audience, or that their messages need to be reworked. In this case, you should offer stronger messages.
- Identify the group's target audience as narrowly as possible. Who are they? How old are they? What is their political affiliation? How do they feel about other social issues?
- Define a strategy in terms of the five spheres of public interest communications we've discussed: media, policy, communities of influence, social marketing and activism.
- Identify a call to action that is specific and actionable.
- List specific tactics within the domains you've selected.
- Describe what success would look like.

Organizing the issue brief:

You may find it helpful to organize the issue brief like this:

- Overview: brief description of your organization and its history, how the organization became prominent on the issue, how they're funded, and what their agenda is.
- Position: What is the organization's objective? What other things have they already achieved toward this goal? Who supports and opposes this group? What kinds of credible evidence supports the group's position? What is their goal?
- Context: What kinds of things are happening right now that could advance or hinder the group's movement toward its goals?
- Audience: Who is the audience for your group's message? What evidence do you have that they are likely to support your group's cause? How can they be reached? What motivates them?
- Strategy and Tactics: This should be the meat of your brief, and include the spheres in which you will work, what you know about the issue and the path that directs you towards, and the specific ways you will enlist your audience in your campaign. You should also include your core message and call to action.

- Evaluation: How will you determine your success? Use the see, say, feel, do model we'll discuss in class.

Your presentation should include each of these, in a compelling and visual format that engages each of us. You will have 20 minutes to present your strategy. You may use PowerPoint or Prezi, but no more than three words on a slide, please.

### Schedule of Class Discussions

	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1	Introduction to Public Interest Communications  First writing assignment distributed	Who engages in Public Interest Communications, and why?
Week 2	A brief history of Public Interest Communications	Putting it all together: the strategic planning process  <b>Reaction Paper Assignment due to me, via email, by 5 pm.</b>
Week 3	The five spheres through which we create change: policy, media, social marketing and communities of influence	Working with policymakers
Week 4	Working with the media	Activism
Week 5	Social marketing	Communities of Influence
Week 6	<b>QUIZ: Switch</b> <b>Class discussion: Switch</b>	Message development
Week 7	The science of storytelling	The ethics of Public Interest Communications
Week 8	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	Working with scientists and the importance of good science to meaningful and effective change.
Week 9	The Importance of empathy to creating social change	<b>QUIZ: The Brand Gap</b>

		<b>Class Discussion: The Brand Gap</b>
Week 10	Design for social change	<b>QUIZ: The Dragonfly Effect And Short and Sweet Class Discussion: The Dragonfly Effect</b>
Week 11	The opportunities digital platforms create for social change	Research methods and polling
Week 12	<b>QUIZ: The Other Wes Moore Class Discussion: The Other Wes Moore</b>	The importance of communicating visually
Week 13	Evaluating our results  Read: See, Say, Feel, Do	The fields that influence Public Interest Communications
Week 14	TBA	TBA
Week 15	Project presentations	Project presentations
Week 16	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	