PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

URKOVIA ANDREWS, GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

This course introduces students to the aspects of public relations firms while highlighting the business component of the industry. This is completed through the application and analysis of public relations operations and counseling actualized through the implementation of class agencies. Most public relations work takes place in a group setting; however, most students only work with a group for a short period of time to complete a limited number of assignments. This course allows students to work in a small group course for the duration of the semester as the majority of the exercises/client works are designed for a small group. As a firm students decide on their job positions and the amount they will charge for their work based on current public relations experience, thus highlight the business aspect. It is not uncommon to read articles encouraging students to understand not just the technical side of public relations, but the business element as well. This course introduces students to business elements they may not receive in a traditional liberal arts course, such as devising an invoice and determining a competitive hourly rate.

SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Public Relations Firms and Counseling is designed to help you understand this particular application of public relations work. The class will review the evolution of public relations firms, relevant public relations management issues and theory, as well as principles and theories of counseling clients. Application and analysis of public relations agency operations and counseling are actualized through the implementation of class agencies.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course is intended to help students understand the various operations conducted within a public relations firm, along with the various roles held by practitioners working in a firm. Upon completion of this course students should be able to:

- Identify, describe, and implement the various agency roles
- Operate within the varying aspects of firm-client relations in an agency setting
- Conduct a training & development workshop for a client
- Employ strategies for social media monitoring and as a social media network community manager for clients
- Illustrate the billing process necessary to maintain agency success

- Apply principles and strategies essential to working in an agency environment

REQUIRED TEXT & SUPPLIES

Croft, A.C. (2006). *Managing a PR firm for growth and profit*, 2nd ed. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press. ISBN: 0-7890-2865-4 (optional)

Goldstein, N. (2012). *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*, ed. Fully revised and updated. Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Publishing

Assigned Readings (per tentative syllabus schedule)

Council of Public Relations Firms. (2009). *The firm voice compendium: Outstanding best practices for public relations firms.* (Readings from this document are labeled in the tentative topic outline with **FV** next to them)

Public Relations Society of America. (1993). *Public Relations Professional Career Guide*.

Cision account (www.cision.com)

CisionPoint is a software used by numerous public relations firms. Through CisionPoint University you will receive the opportunity to learn this software that is currently in use by many firms. There is an opportunity for you to receive CisionPoint accreditation to show future employers that you can use this program. You will receive a certificate from CisionPoint if you choose to seek their accreditation. I will send you the necessary email so you can develop your CisionPoint account.

PROpenMic account (www.propenmic.org)

PROpenMic is a social network community for public relations students, faculty & PR pros worldwide. As per the website, " In a recent mini-survey of practitioners, I found that many firms are looking for real world social network experience from interns and new hires. Specifically, they want students that can transfer the experience to community management and customer service engagement within social networks" (French, 2009). This will be an opportunity for each of you to gain social network community manager experience.

Calculator

Access to a video recording device

COURSE POLICIES

GRADING

- Training & Development Workshop 100
- Exercises/Client Work 275
- Quizzes (4@ 25 pts. each) 100
- Final Exam 50
- Teammate Evaluations 50
- Future Planning 50
- **Total possible points** **625**

LETTER GRADES

- 625-563 = 90-100% = A
- 562-500 = 80-89% = B
- 499-438 = 70-79% = C
- 437-375 = 60-69% = D
- 0-374 =Below 59 = F

ATTENDANCE POLICY

As in an actual agency setting, you are responsible for coming to work and being available to work with clients. For this agency, you are permitted eight "sick days" for the term and will be fired should you miss more. (Translation: Per the departmental attendance policy, you will fail should you miss more than 25% of the class periods.) *Attendance is expected and necessary for your success in this agency. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late to work, you will be counted absent.*

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Cheating and plagiarism will **NOT** be tolerated. Students must be familiar with the University Student Conduct Code Policies and Procedures for 2012-2013. The definitions of academic dishonesty and plagiarism are attached. *Cheating or plagiarizing on any assignments will result in failure of that assignment and depending on the severity of the situation may lead to failure of the course.* A second offense will result in failure of the course.

CIVILITY STATEMENT

Students are expected to communicate in a civil manner in academic interactions at all times, both in and out of the classroom. This means that interactions are to be carried out in polite, courteous, and dignified manners, which are respectful and understanding toward both peers and professors. Failure to behave in a civil manner may result in disciplinary actions as described by the *Student Conduct Code*.

(Note: If civility is not addressed in the student handbook, a departmental policy could be adopted and utilized instead.)

AGENCY RULES

Your inability or lack of desire to complete any of the tasks agreed upon within the agency can result in termination. (Refer to your group contract.) In order to "terminate" an employee, a letter of recommendation for termination must be submitted to the instructor detailing the reasoning for this termination (i.e. agreed upon tasks not met, time limits, evidence proving lack of participation, etc.). This letter must also possess signatures from the majority of the account team. **If you are fired**, this will result in a drop of one letter grade on your final class grade. The dismissed student then meets with me to determine whether another group would be interested in hiring on another member, or whether individual completion of the assignment(s) would be more appropriate to complete requirements for the term. Any request for dismissal must be filed at least five weeks prior to the last day of class.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

As a practitioner in an agency, it is not uncommon to be hired to provide workshops for various clients. Workshops can range from sensitivity classes, to diversity in the workplace, to communication and conflict, and so much more. Your group (firm) has been hired to provide a workshop or seminar for a client. Your firm will decide the best approach for this workshop or seminar and conduct it for the class, as if we were your client. Two weeks prior to the scheduled time for the workshops, each group will pull a workshop topic from a list of provided topics. Your training and development workshop should last the duration of the 75 minute class time. During this workshop you will be graded on handouts and supporting documentation, information provided/lecture, opportunity for class to participate in individual work, training format, execution, and overall completion. You will also submit a worksheet demonstrating your planning of the workshop prior to implementation. A sample worksheet is provided on the class Blackboard page. Additional information for each of the workshop sections is also available on the class Blackboard page.

CLIENT WORK

MANAGING PROPENMIC (50 PTS)

During this course we will manage PROpenMic for one week. This is an opportunity for each of you to gain experience as a social network community manager. If you have not developed an account you will need to do so prior to the week we manage the site. Although we will be focusing on the theme of case studies, as of now, you will need to post information individually. Here is a checklist of items you will need to accomplish if you are attempting to gain the full 50 points this assignment is worth. **(1)**You must have a complete profile in PROpenMic; **(2)** You must write ***two blog posts*** with substance. Substance means you discuss the problem, reason for importance, personal insights, what this means for public relations, etc. (The aforementioned list is designed to get you started, it is NOT exhaustive.) One of the blog post should include a media component (i.e. video, podcast, etc.); **(3)** Post comments on a minimum of 5 blogs. Two of your comment posts should be on blogs of non-classmates. In essence, use this as an opportunity to network with other public relations folks.; **(4)**Participate in at least one discussion. Again, your participation should have substance. In addition to participation you should also join a minimum of two groups.; **(5)** Submit a one page overview of your experience with this assignment (i.e. likes, dislikes, information learned, etc.).Your one-page overview is due the immediate class period after we manage the site. Don't forget to send me a friend request on PROpenMic so I can see the groups you've joined, comments posted, etc. I look forward to reading your thoughts on various case studies.

DESCRIPTION PAPER (30 PTS)

You will develop a PR firm with select members from the class. During week four your group (firm) description paper is due. One person from the team will need to submit the group paper, in class and on the class Blackboard page. The following items must be addressed within in the paper: Description of firm; Strategic position or working philosophy (p. 45 & 76) *handout*; Description of team members, along with their job titles; Firm name and logo; and the vision for the agency. The decisions you make now concerning your firm will be used throughout the course of the semester, thus you will need to discuss and agree upon the industry and direction your firm will take. You will be graded on content, limited grammatical errors, and clarity.

Invoice (10 pts)

This is the opportunity to determine an appropriate competitive hourly rate. You will also demonstrate that you can create an efficient invoice in order to bill a client for work you have completed. Invoices will be submitted individually.

Social Media Monitoring (100 pts)

This assignment gives you an opportunity to learn how to monitor blogs and other social media content in a way that provides similar insight offered by more traditional environmental scanning methods. Many people will discuss your client or organization and its products/services on their own Web sites or on social media sites, outside of realm traditional media. Just as it is important for you to know what the media and your community are saying about your organization and its products/services, it is important to know what is being said in social media sites like blogs, social networks, and message boards. For this assignment, you will **(1)** monitor the online conversation that has occurred about an organization or brand of your choosing since the beginning of the semester; **(2)** create a table for your data; and **(3)** write an analysis of the conversation with suggestions for action. You might find bloggers who are blogging about your client organization or brand, people who are creating Web sites about it, message board members who are discussing it in forums, Twitter users who are twittering about it, social networking users who are commenting about it, or online video producers who are posting YouTube videos about it. Let me know by next Thursday whom you will be completing this project with and which organization you are choosing using the discussion thread on the class Blackboard page. NOTE: The first pair to "claim" a Public Relations Firm "gets" the company. No duplicates! (This assignment is heavily adapted from a former colleague who adapted the assignment from another colleague.) We will be relying on our Cision account during this time period as well.

Speaker Questions (15 pts)

Throughout the semester there will be a number of guest speakers visiting the class either via Skype or in-person. Due to lack of abundance of firms in our immediate area, guest speakers may range from alumni, friends of the department, etc. However, all guest speakers will currently work or will have previously worked in a public relations firm. Prior to each visit you will need to develop 10 questions that you can ask our speaker at the end of their presentation. Questions do not have to be typed, but must be legible for grading purposes. Prior to the presentation I will circle the classroom to check-off that you have 10 questions prepared for our guest speaker.

Quick Think (60 pts)

The class will participate in an exercise titled "Quick Think." There are times when corporations call on you to get a better understanding of your firm or to inform you that you are a finalist in a RFP bid. This exercise is designed around that philosophy. In essence, your group will receive an informal RFP in which you will have 48 hours to prepare and pitch. Your presentation will need to encompass the following three sections: **(1) Capabilities**: Here you will describe your firms strengths; strategic position; and results obtained for any previous clients; **(2) Invoice**: *(Submission only),* This should be a final bill dictating items worked on and time donated to each section; **(3) Prospectus:** *(This section should also be written for submission prior to your presentation.)* This includes a situation analysis; research; goals and objectives; target audience; strategy and tactics; evaluation; and information about your account team. You will have 20-30 minutes for your presentation as two groups will be presenting on each designated day. For our purposes I will provide you with two RFP proposals based on current issues that align with your groups chosen area of interest. As a group you will decide which RFP you prefer and prepare accordingly. Remember you will only have 48 hours to prepare and pitch, so check your e-mail often. Each group will receive an e-mail via their Blackboard e-mail account with RFP options no later than 9:30 a.m. on either the Sunday or Tuesday prior to when you will present.

MISCELLANEOUS (10 PTS)

This form of client work is reserved for both in-class and homework assignments to assess your understanding of material. Exercises for this section may include in-class discussions, reaction papers, article critiques, case studies, and more.

FUTURE PLANNING

The week following the break your future planning papers and accompanying presentations are due. The paper is an application of what we have discussed this term. It is an analysis and assessment of your firm as if it were to continue into the future. Please put it together as professionally as possible. The exact paper format is your decision but it would make sense to begin with some introduction about firms (agencies) or your firm, and provide a thesis statement of what's to come in the rest of the discussion. One option is to create your own account evaluation or audit (see handout) to use as a basis for discussing issues identified below. Or you could provide an overall description and attach some parts as appendices including a formal audit. Listing answers without providing some explanation is unacceptable. You should use predominantly narrative style. You are encouraged to integrate materials from class notes and handouts/readings. The sections/questions that need to be addressed and their point values are as follows: **(1) Billing**-cost for work completed. Explanation and time sheet included. How do you rate your firm based on Croft's audit points on financial management? (15 pts.); **(2) Account Evaluation**-include evaluation based on account work produced. From the client side, what kind of recommendations do you have for selecting PR firms based on your experience (or how would you select)? Also check account work per Croft's audit suggestions. (15 pts.); **(3) Assessment**-As an independent firm, what would be the firm's selling points-based on work completed this semester and work you know your group is capable of producing? Check agency and account management issues discussed by Croft. What should your firm do to promote itself for paying clients and for future growth? (10 pts); and **(4) Overall presentation**-organization, creativity, content and writing (10 pts.)

TENTATIVE TOPIC OUTLINE

DATE	TOPIC/ASSIGNMENT	READINGS
WEEK 1	Course Overview/ What are Firms?	Ch. 1
	Agency principal	Ch. 2
WEEK 2	Agency job descriptions	*The Public Relations Professional Career Guide Tapping the "right stuff" in an account executive-3.25* ***(FV)***
	****Guest speaker**** This guest speaker is the agency principal of a firm located in a metropolitan area. The speaker will discuss firm culture, how to determine if a firm is the "right fit" for you, this firms hiring practices, etc.	

DATE	TOPIC/ASSIGNMENT	READINGS
WEEK 3	History and trends	
	Creativity ****Quiz 1****	Ch. 3
WEEK 4	The prospectus	Ch. 5,6, 7
	Research ****Description paper due****	Ch. 9 *What Clients Want: Your opinion-based on research, experience, business-5.36* ***(FV)*** *Employing measurement research for success-7.27* ***(FV)***
WEEK 5	Organizational issues: time charts, fee structures	Ch. 12 & 14 *Managing PR Firm by numbers to increase profit-1.49* ***(FV)***
	Pitching **** Quiz 2****	Ch. 8 *Flexible business strategy-2.27* ***(FV)*** *Demonstrate +Delivery=Dollars: How to convince companies they need PR help now-2.3* ***(FV)***
WEEK 6	Quick Think	
WEEK 7	Quick Think	
	****Guest speaker**** This guest speaker is the agency principal of a virtual firm. The speaker will discuss billing, pitching clients, creativity, etc.	
WEEK 8	Training and Development	Ch. 11 *The people equation: Can you keep and develop them?-3.15* ***(FV)*** *PR firms differ on the best way to train outstanding account executives-3.16* ***(FV)***
	Counseling Issues ****Social Media Monitoring due****	*How to sell crisis services before your client needs them-7.15* ***(FV)***
WEEK 9	****Guest speaker**** This guest speaker works for a PR firm. The speaker will discuss personnel issues, pros and cons of working for a firm, training opportunities available within a firm, etc.	

DATE	TOPIC/ASSIGNMENT	READINGS
	Future Planning Freelancing ****Quiz 3****	Ch. 16 & 20 *Preventing people poaching: Lateral hiring among agencies—and how to stop it-1.29* **(FV)** *Marketing your firm in a stormy economy: Embrace strengthens, don't overreach, and sharpen social media skills—here's how-2.10* ***(FV)*** Ch. 13
WEEK 10	Training and Development Workshops	
WEEK 11	Training and Development Workshops	
WEEK 12	Training and Development Workshops	
WEEK 13	****Manage PROpenMic****	
WEEK 14	Client Relations-conflict management	Ch. 12 (p153-160)
	Entrepreneurship ****Quiz 4****	Ch. 4 & 10
WEEK 15	****Thanksgiving Break****	
WEEK 16	****Future Planning****	
WEEK 17	**FINAL EXAM**	

*Syllabus is subject to change without notification.

APPENDIX 1. GRADING RUBRIC FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

**Partial points can be assessed at instructors' discretion.*

	A. Handouts/Giveaways Are they beneficial? Do they reinforce the workshop topic? Are they easily understood? Can I apply the information from the handout in the future? Are giveaways appropriate for the workshop? Will they jog participants' memory?
15 pts	Handouts/giveaways are concrete and explicitly linked to the workshop. Items reinforce the workshop topic, are easily understood, etc. All areas clearly addressed.
10	Handouts/ giveaways concrete and explicit but don't reinforce topic.
5	Handouts/giveaways provided, but poorly executed. They lack concrete association with the workshop topic, inappropriate, and will not jog participants' memory.
0	No handouts/giveaways provided. Area not addressed.
	B. Information provided/Lecture Was at least 1/3 of the workshop informational? Session topics appropriate for workshop? Was novel information revealed? Emphasis on self-awareness, roles, or relationships?
15 pts	Approximately 20-25 minutes of delivered workshop is informational and appropriate for overall topic. Sub-topics support workshop and provide novel information. All areas clearly addressed.
10	Meet the approximate 20 minute minimum for delivery of information. Subtopics support the workshop but lack novel information.
5	Within 5 minutes of the minimum 20 minute range. Some subtopics support workshop. No novel information revealed.
0	No information provided. Area not addressed.
	C. Individual work included Was there an opportunity for individual participation? Reflection, activity, etc.?
10 pts	Clear opportunity through an activity, etc., for students to individually participate in the training and development. Activity provides new skill or novel approach to reinforce skill that correlates with the workshop. All areas clearly addressed.
6	Individual participation activity provided. Novel approach used but minimal reinforcement of skill.
3	Individual participation activity provided. Activity lacks novel approach. Minimal or no reinforcement of skill. Activity rushed.
0	No individual participation opportunity provided. Area not addressed.
	D. Training Format Application applied? Format appropriate for topic? Provided opportunity to practice learned skills?
10 pts	An appropriate training format was utilized for the topic (i.e. role play, discussion, etc.). Skill demonstrated to the group, along with an opportunity for classmates to practice the skill. All areas clearly addressed.
6	Appropriate training format utilized. Demonstrated and provided opportunity to practice learned skill.
3	Training format used not ideal for topic, but acceptable. Provided opportunity to practice learned skill, but did not demonstrate skill to classmates. Minimal application.

0	Inappropriate training format. Area not addressed.
	E. Execution Were all team members prepared? Would you suggest the workshop to others? Did all members take an equal part? Organized: ability to adapt to the situation?
15 pts	Group clearly prepared, organized, and workshop well-structured and executed. Easily adapted to issues (e.g. equipment failure, talkative classmates, etc.). All members equally contributed to delivery of the workshop. All areas clearly addressed.
10	Group members prepared and organized, but minimal execution problems. All members equally contributed to delivery of the workshop. Needs to work on adapting to issues.
5	Group members lack preparation. Workshop delivery dominated by a few group members. No or poor workshop structure. Unable or seldom able to adapt to situations.
0	No workshop presented. Area not addressed.
	F. Overall Dressed appropriately? Relaxed. Engaging? Consistent theme? Strong communication skills? Ability to facilitate large and/or small groups? Interesting? Utilized appropriate methods for adult learners. Memorable. Timely.
10 pts	Group dressed appropriately. Group displayed strong communication skills. Stayed within the allotted time frame for the workshop. Methods utilized appropriate for adult learners.
6	Majority of group dressed appropriately. Workshop flowed smoothly. Minor facilitation issues. Areas of inconsistency with information. Work needs to be done on staying within allotted time frame and/or using time wisely.
3	Lack team appearance. Not comfortable presenting information. Struggle with facilitation of workshop. Inconsistency with information presented. Rushed. Significant issues with respect to allotted time frame.
0	No workshop presented. Area not addressed.

Workshop Score ________/75

Worksheet Score ________/25

TOTAL POINTS ________/100

COMMENTS: ____

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APPENDIX 2. SAMPLE WORKSHEET FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Topic: Public Relations

Lesson Title: Understanding and Incorporating Public Relations; "How does PR fit into your business?"

Target Audience and Setting: African-American Business Owners

Behavioral Outcome/Objectives

1. Differentiate between public relations and marketing
2. Identify areas of Public Relations that can be incorporated into personal businesses
3. Discuss various communication tools

Procedure:

Participants will listen to a 10-20 minute lecture on public relations in small business, how it complements marketing, and various communication tools used by practitioners. All participants own a small business, thus are looking for ways to bring in or maintain customers.

Participants will receive a handout of the presentation, along with information from nationally recognized organizations, such as PR Tactics or PRSA. A blank slip of paper will be distributed to participants before the presentation for them to write what they think or know PR to be. Slips will be placed in a bag with select ones being read to prompt discussion and myths.

Evaluation/Assessment:

A blank slip of paper will be distributed to participants for them write what they think or know PR to be now that they've heard the presentation. Select slips will be read and a consensus will be taken by a show of hands to prompt discussion.

Participants will be asked to fill out an evaluation form on the facilitator and/or overall summit regarding clarity of the presentation, other workshops desired, acceptance of format, location, etc.

Materials Needed:

Paper, pen, and a container will be needed. Evaluation forms will be distributed at the end.

Page 2 of worksheet

Understanding & Incorporating PR-- How does PR fit into your business?

Public Relations is:

- You must first define and understand PR before it can be incorporated, identified, or expanded in your business.
- How do you define PR? (read samples)

Key phrases to define PR:

- Establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships
- Planned, deliberate, 2-way communication
- Proposal or asked out → place → acceptance or denial
  - How do you maintain this new found relationship?

Various functions in PR:

- Industry relations, counseling, development/fundraising, special events, etc.

- Talking with other engaged couples ⟶ counseling ⟶ car breakdown/addition to family surprise ⟶ party, etc.
- All require effective communications

Communication styles:

- Novice businesses fall into 2-way asymmetric (newlywed communication)
- Should move more to 2-way symmetric (seasoned communication)

Difference and complement of PR and marketing

- PR
    - Builds relationships
    - Creates understanding and cooperation
    - Save money for the organization
- Marketing
    - Selling products
    - Limits PR to publicity and promotions

Various communication tools:

- When deciding how to communicate keep the following in mind
    - Print-ideal for detail information because ability to review the information at a later time (eg. Letter to the editor, op-ed, brochures, media advisory, annual report, etc.)
    - Radio-high speed and flexible; can reach a large audience and quickly (eg. Newscasts, talk shows, PSA's, etc.)
    - Television-great persuasive impact; 50% of what we retain is based on what we see and hear (eg. guest appearances, PSA's, talk shows, etc.)
    - Online media-supplement to print media; can be cheaper (eg. e-zines, e-pubs, e-mags)

APPENDIX 3. GRADING RUBRIC FOR MANAGING PROPENMIC

A. Profile ________/5
   a. Complete
   b. Finished before end of week
   c. Friends with me
B. Blog posts _______/________/20
   a. 2 minimum
   b. Substantial information (i.e. discuss problems, etc)
   c. Significant to public relations
C. Comments posted ________/5
   a. Posted on a minimum of 5 blogs
   b. 2 of the required posts on students' blogs of non-classmates
D. Discussion ________/10
   a. Participated in at least one discussion
   b. Participation could be starting a forum as well
   c. Joined a minimum of two groups
E. Overview of experience ________/10
   a. Maintain one-page
   b. Address likes, dislikes, etc.

Total points _______/50

Comments: ____

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APPENDIX 4. CONFIDENTIAL TEAMMATE EVALUATION

This is due at the beginning of class on the last class meeting day. Since they are confidential, peer evaluations must be placed in a sealed envelope. Complete the form **without** consulting other group members. Each group member should be evaluated on overall contributions to group efforts. Base your evaluations on the quality and quantity of members' contributions to group work and the final products produced this semester. Email me if you have questions, concerns, or additional comments you wish to add to this evaluation.

EVALUATE (5 is very strong; 1 is least strong)	**Teammate name**	**Teammate name**	**Teammate name**	**Your name**
Meet deadlines, keeps promises				
Client service				
Quality writing				
Creativity				
Knowledge of industry				
Quality of presentation capabilities				
Research capabilities				
Participated in all activities				
Takes initiative				
Accessible				
Total				