

Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Mass Communications

Syllabus and Class Schedule for Spring 2010

MASC 425 Public Relations Research (SL: Service Learning¹)

Instructor: Dr. Yan Jin
Office: 2208C, Temple Building
Telephone: 827-3764
E-mail: yjin@vcu.edu
Class Hours: Tuesday, 4:00 to 6:40
Classroom: Temple 2221

Office Hours: Tuesday, 12-3; Wednesday, 1-3. Please use sign-up sheets on Dr. Jin's office door to reserve time with Dr. Jin. For other appointments, please email her at yjin@vcu.edu.

Prerequisite: MASC 323 Public Relations, completed with a grade of C or better

OBJECTIVES:

(1) To review recent developments in public relations research; (2) to understand the contexts and uses of research in public relations; and (3) to introduce you how to use those research skills to facilitate public relations practice and program evaluation. Real client experience will allow you to apply the research methods to public relations practice as well as providing insights for local business development.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course reviews the latest principles of public relations with emphasis upon the crucial role of research to develop informed strategy, monitor communication programs, and to evaluate overall public relations campaign effectiveness. The course imparts a managerial perspective rather than a technical skill approach to the use of a wide range of research methods. Students begin the semester with an extensive orientation to the types of research essential at various stages of communication planning. Lectures and projects help the student to understand specific research techniques such as content analysis, focus groups, and surveys from hands-on participation.

SPRING 2010 COMMUNITY PARTNER:

For the Spring 2010 semester, students in MASC 425 will be working with The United Way. The project is funded by a grant VCU School of Social Work received to promote low income population's financial literacy. Each student will be working in PR research teams to identify the needs of The United Way's target publics and the best communication channels to connect with them, as well as provide insights on what key messages The United Way should consider using in order to achieve its communication objectives and contribute to the long term goal of this grant project. Students will work closely with the client and its key publics through the semester to provide communication research service so that the client to better understand its key markets. Students will use both quantitative research methods (e.g., survey, content analysis) and qualitative research

¹ VCU Statement of Service-Learning: Service-Learning at Virginia Commonwealth University is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs. Students reflect on the service activity to increase understanding and application of course content and to enhance a sense of civic responsibility.

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methods (e.g., indepth interviews, focus groups, and participate observation) to collect research results from the key publics in the community. The research reports will be submitted and presented to the client and judge members with relevant professional experience from the community.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

All students must (1) complete all readings; (2) display a command of the material in exercises, discussions, and individual assignments; (3) participate as a team member in developing and presenting a research report and portfolio to the client. Assignment sheets will provide details well in advance of due dates.

REQUIRED TEXT:

- Stacks, D. *Primer of Public Relations Research*, New York, Guilford Press, 2002.

CLASS RULES:

1. Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes. If you are unable to attend class, please notify Dr. Jin by email, by phone or in person of your planned absence **BEFORE** class. Missing two classes without excuses will fail you the class. You must present a medical or other suitable excuse to make up any missed assignments.

2. No food or drink is allowed in the classroom unless authorized by the instructor. Please turn off your cellular phones and beepers before class begins. In class, you may not sleep, wear headphones or use electronic devices for purposes not related to the class content. We will have discussion sessions so please do not conduct side conversations or create other disruptions. Be on time for class and plan on meeting for the entire class period.

EVALUATION²:

Evaluation will necessarily be subjective, but the instructor makes every effort to keep students apprised of expectations. In particular, you should pay close attention to the assignment sheets and participate actively in thought questions and the exam review sessions.

1. Individual Assignments (3)	30%
2. Research Portfolio (Group Work)	30%
3. Final Presentation to Client (Group Performance)	20%
4. Participation (Class attendance, group meeting and peer evaluation)	20%
TOTAL POINTS	100%

Assignments and group work must meet the following academic and professional standards:

Timeliness: As a professional you will be judged on your ability to keep deadlines. Late assignments will NOT be accepted except with a doctor's excuse.

Quality of Work: You are expected to maintain the highest standards for all assignments. Therefore, you will be graded on the following:

² Each of the evaluation items includes reflection activities that will integrate students' in-class and out-of-class learning with the SL client.

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- ◆ Accurate punctuation, grammar and spelling;
- ◆ Professional appearance and professional business writing style.

Your **final grade** in the course will be calculated as follows:

A = 90% to 100%

B = 80% to 89%

C = 70% to 79%

D = 60% to 69%

F = 59% or below

VCU Honor Code:

The VCU Honor System will be strictly enforced in this class. Cheating, fabricating material or using another's work without attribution (plagiarism) will earn you an automatic F in the course, and your name will be turned to appropriate university officials. The honor policy provides substantial penalties for violation including expulsion from the University. The full text of the VCU Honor System policies can be found at <http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/rg7honor.html>

ADA: If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and need assistance, please notify the instructor immediately. All reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate your needs.

Religious Holidays: Students are excused for religious holidays. Please let me know in advance if you have a conflict.

What to Know and Do To Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU:

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>). Keep your information up-to-date.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>).
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

Student Technical Standards

The School of Mass Communications has created descriptions of technical standards required for various professions within communications, including but not limited to print journalism, broadcast journalism, on-line journalism, advertising, public relations and photography. These technical standards – in the areas of motor skills, sensory-observation abilities, communication skills, cognitive skills and behavioral capabilities – reflect the performance abilities and characteristics that are necessary to successfully complete the requirements of the academic programs at the School. These standards are not requirements of admission into the programs. The School of Mass Communications complies with the requirements and spirit of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Therefore, the School will endeavor to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified. The complete technical standards may be found at

http://www.has.vcu.edu/mac/ugrad_programs/tech_stand.html

Commitment to Diversity

It is vital that students in this course broaden their journalism/mass communications experiences, with guidance from the instructor, by including in their course work people and subjects such as ethnic, racial and religious minorities, people with disabilities, the disadvantaged, gay men and lesbians, and other similar groups. This includes, but is not limited to, developing a sensitivity to language and images that may create an appearance of bias. The intent is to ensure that student work reflects the diversity of the community, and that students are exposed to diverse ideas and perspectives. In this class, it is the shared responsibility of the instructor and students to foster an environment that supports free expression.

The VCU School of Mass Communications is committed to diversity in all aspects of its program, including providing a climate of inclusion as well as addressing student and faculty hiring and retention, curriculum, research and scholarship, and outreach and service. Students are encouraged to review the School's Diversity Plan, which is posted on the School's Website at:

<http://www.has.vcu.edu/mac>