

Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Mass Communications

Syllabus and Class Schedule for Spring 2011

MASC 439-901 Public Relations Campaign (SL: Service Learning¹)

Instructor: Dr. Yan Jin
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E-mail: yjin@vcu.edu
Class Hours: Wednesday, 4:00 to 6:40
Classroom: Temple 1137

Service Learning Graduate Teaching Assistant:
Jediah Jones: jonesje@vcu.edu

Office Hours: Monday, 1-3; Tuesday, 1-4. 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.

Prerequisites: MASC 335 and MASC 425, completed with C or above.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is your capstone for becoming a public relations professional. It will build on all of the critical thinking, research and writing skills, and tools and technology application skills that you have previously developed. You will extend and master those skills while applying public relations principles and theories to the planning and execution of public relations campaigns.

You and your classmates will construct a strategic communication campaign for an assigned client. In addition to a written campaign plan, you will present the completed campaign to the client. This will be judged by a panel of experts.

Because this is a service-learning course, your client will be a not-for-profit organization from the local Richmond community which could not otherwise afford to pay for professional PR consultation.

COMMUNITY CLIENT INFORMATION

For the Spring 2011 semester, students in MASC 439-001 will be working with **VCU Division of Community Engagement on Caring to Act Calendar**. Service-learning at VCU is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs. This collaborative teaching and learning strategy is designed to promote and encourage course content, personal growth and civic engagement. Typically, a service-learning course requires a minimum of 15 hours of service with selected nonprofit and community-based organizations or schools.

Each student team will develop a communication campaign book for the client including situation analysis,

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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objectives, strategies & tactics and evaluation, etc. Student teams will work with the client through the semester to provide PR campaign service, which will be utilized by the client to communicate with its key publics in order to achieve its long-term goals.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The goals of this course include:

- (1) **Know-How.** This course is aimed to introduce you to concepts and methods of public relations campaign planning and communication management and to enhance your understanding of how strategic public relations planning fits within the broader framework of organizational goals.
- (2) **Hands-on Experience.** This course is aimed to afford you valuable work experience in strategic campaign practice and sharpen your overall skills in research, planning, organizing, managing time, and evaluation, as well as communicating with clients and colleagues in writing and in person.
- (3) **Professional Career.** This course is aimed to prepare you with refined abilities to present and defend complex strategic communication decisions in a clear and concise manner and to help you build your professional CV and portfolio.
- (4) **Writing Intensive Learning.** This course will provide experience in problem-based writing through the creation of a comprehensive strategic plan developed through a series of draft documents over the course of the semester.

The objectives of this class are to help you gain proficiency in the following areas:

- critical evaluation of your work and the work of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness
- conduct research and evaluation information by methods appropriate to the communication profession
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relation to communications
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students enrolled in MASC 439 will gain at the minimum gain proficiency or will master 12 mass communications core values and competencies that have been adopted by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications which accredits the School of Mass Communications and are included in the School's assessment plan. The 12 values and competencies are:

- Domestic diversity: Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in domestic society in relationship to mass communications.
- Global diversity: Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures in global society in relationship to mass communications.
- Use of Images: Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of PR graphics.
- Ethics: Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically as an individual and as a team member in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think Critically & Creatively: Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Research & Evaluate Information: Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to public relations campaign and program development.

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- **Writing Abilities:** Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for public relations profession, different organizations, audiences and purposes they serve.
- **Evaluation:** Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- **Numbers & Statistics:** Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts in understanding research results and providing insights to inform and evaluate public relations activities.
- **Tools & Technologies:** Apply tools and technologies appropriate for public relations profession.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Strategic Planning for Public Relations. By Ronald D. Smith.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course Structure

This course tries to mimic real life as much as possible, so that students are well prepared to hit the ground running in the professional world. Students will work together in a student-staffed strategic communication agency. Students will be assigned, based on demonstrated communication skills and strength, to various roles and responsibilities in the professional firm infrastructure. Students in class work together with a real life client to develop a strategic communication campaign plan.

There are two aspects to the course: the process and the deliverable. The process has to do with the day-to-day activities and contact with clients required to achieve your final communication plan. The process is about accountability and a need for communication. This course teaches you how to develop agendas, call reports, meeting minutes and other pieces of communication that you'll use throughout your career. The deliverable is your final plan book and your presentation to your client at the end of the semester. The focus of the course is on identification of the problem faced by the client, thorough narrative description of the situation, goals, strategies and tactics needed to address the problem, and a description of means for evaluation of the proposed campaign. Plan books entail as many as 100 pages of text and supporting materials created by the team.

Student account executives will serve as the primary contact with both the client and the instructor. All team works are to be democratic. All members in the agency will share equally in both the glory and ignominy that the agency might earn through its performance.

For the most part, the instructor will serve as agency manager, supervising the agency performance in conjunction with the team coach (graduate service learning teach assistant) and the agency deputy manager, doing my best to facilitate your success.

Plan Book

In essence, during the semester you should define a problem/opportunity identified in conjunction with the client and develop a plan for addressing the problem/opportunity. You will provide both the client and us with a copy of the plan. Depending on circumstances, you may or may not implement any elements of the plan during the quarter. However, plan elements should be fully developed for immediate implementation by the client (e.g. releases written with dates left blank). Computer driven proposal presentations will be made to the instructors and the client.

The course “deliverable” that each team creates is a product called the plan book, often abbreviated to “the

book,” and sometimes called the campaign deck. The plan book contains ideas on how to address the challenge(s) presented by the client. This is a written comprehensive communication plan that addresses the following areas:

- **Situation Analysis (based on formative research, primary and/or secondary research)**
- **Goals and Objectives**
- **Target Audiences**
- **Strategy**
- **Key Messages**
- **Central Theme**
- **Tactics** (Students are encouraged to develop tactical packages that reflect creative problem-solving.)
- **Budget** (The budget for the planned campaign is determined by the client. The size of the budget is less important than *how* the team would spend the money.)
- **Calendar/Timetable**
- **Evaluation Criteria** (This is a description of the steps you will take to evaluate your campaign. Your evaluations should address your proposed PR/communication objectives as reflected in your campaign book.)

Examples of campaign plan books will be reviewed during the second class session and made available for your perusal throughout the semester. A Campaign Plan Checklist will be distributed to provide a comprehensive guide.

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 (including in-class team meetings) 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 social media connection 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:

1. Warm-up Exercise	5%
2. Faved Campaign Presentation (Individual)	5%
3. Weekly SL reflection shared via blogging and/or imaging (Individual)	10%
4. Peer Evaluation (Individual)	10%
5. Weekly Work in Progress Presentations and Cross-Critiques (Group)	10%
6. Midterm Presentation to the Agency (Group)	10%
7. Delivery of Written Communication Plan Book (Group)	30%
8. Delivery of Final Oral Presentations to Client (Group)	20%
TOTAL POINTS	100%

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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:

- ◆ 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

There will be no scheduled exams for this course. If you accomplish all the course requirements, you will receive an A. Evaluation from your client and your team members will be also taken into consideration to determine whether you fulfill your required work.

Peer evaluations: in a confidential manner, your teammates will provide feedback about your work in the middle and at the end of the semester using anonymous peer evaluation forms. More frequent evaluations can occur on the very rare occasion, in the instructor's experience, when an account team does not coalesce well: For example, on occasions a team member left a team (fired or resigned) to create his/her own campaign plan book.

Participation specifications:

1. Attend all class and team meetings.
2. Attend all team group meetings with the instructor and team coach.
3. Participate in the collection of primary and secondary research.
4. Read assigned material if there is any.
5. As part of a team, complete your campaign assignment and work with team members to complete the plan book.
6. Prepare and participate in the verbal and visual presentations of your team's recommendations.
7. Complete individual mid-term and final peer evaluations.

VCU Statement on Safety

What to know and do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (www.vcu.edu/alert/notify). Keep your information up-to-date.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information (www.vcu.edu/alert).

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- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

VCU Honor System

Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education. The Honor System is built on the idea that a person's honor is his/her most cherished attribute. A foundation of honor is essential to a community devoted to learning. Within this community, respect and harmony must coexist. The Honor System is the policy of VCU that defines the highest standards of conduct in academic affairs.

The Honor System states that faculty members are responsible for:

- Understanding the procedures whereby faculty handles suspected instances of academic dishonesty. Faculty are to report any infraction of the VCU Honor System according to the procedures outlined in our policy.
- Developing an instructional environment that reflects a commitment to maintaining and enforcing academic integrity. Faculty should discuss the VCU Honor System at the onset of each course and mention it in course syllabi.
- Handling every suspected or admitted instance of violation of the provisions of this policy in accordance with procedures set forth in the policy.

The Honor System in its entirety can be reviewed on the Web at http://www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/Honor_system_policy.pdf or it can be found in the 2010-11 VCU Insider at <http://www.students.vcu.edu/insider.html>.

The Honor System must be upheld and enforced by each member of the Virginia Commonwealth University community. The fundamental attributes of our community are honor and integrity. We are privileged to operate with this Honor System.

Statement on Americans with Disabilities Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require Virginia Commonwealth University to provide an 'academic adjustment' and/or a 'reasonable accommodation' to any qualified individual with a physical or mental disability who self-identifies as having such. Students should contact the Disability Support Services office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or on the MCV Campus (828-9782) for appropriate academic adjustments or accommodations.

VCU Guidelines for Student Conduct

VCU faculty play a critical role in helping to build an environment that is conducive to the academic success of our students. As you know, VCU has policies and procedures designed to create an environment conducive to academic excellence. One of these policies and procedures can be found in a document entitled "Guidelines for Faculty Members Regarding Student Conduct in the Instructional Settings." This document is available on the VCU Web at <http://www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/FacultyGuideToStudentConductInInstructionalSettings.pdf> or it can be found in the 2010-11 VCU Insider.

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Understanding these guidelines will help you to encourage classroom behavior that does not detract from the quality of each student's educational experience. Please read the document and think about your role in promoting a University culture based on mutual respect and civility.

As a reminder, both faculty and students should turn off cell phones and pagers while in the classroom.

Important Dates

Important dates for the Fall 2010 semester are available at:
http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/calendar/ac_fullViewNew.asp?aYear=2010&aSemester=1

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>

CLASS SCHEDULE

Any necessary changes in the tentative schedule will be announced in class.

Week #1 (January 19): Introduction of syllabus, course expectations, sample plan books, and agency work recruitment and assignment.

Week #2 (January 26): Situation Analysis, Problem Statement, Campaign Benefit Statement
Faved PR campaign presentation
Warm-up exercise due

Week #3 (February 2): **MEET THE CLIENT**
Campaign Formative Research
Discussion: Communication ethics and diversity issue

Week #4 (February 9): Campaign Objectives and Key Publics

Week #5 (February 16): Central Theme and Key Messages

Week #6 (February 23): Strategies and Tactics

Week #7 (March 2): Mid-Term Presentation to the Agency
Mid-term peer evaluation due

Week #8 (March 9): Budget and Timeline, Evaluation Plan

Week #9 (March 16): *No Class. Happy Spring Break! ☺*

Week #10 (March 23): Campaign Planning and Production

Week #11 (March 30): Campaign Planning and Production

Week #12 (April 6): Campaign Planning and Production

Week #13 (April 13): Final Written Communication Plan Book due.

Week #14 (April 20): Oral Presentation Rehearsal in Class.
Final peer evaluation due.

Week #15 (April 27): Final Campaign Presentation to the Client.

Week #16 (May 4): *Reading day. No Class.*

Agency Structure and Job Description

NOTE: Every individual will be fully engaged in brainstorming and discussion sessions across the semester. None of the following roles can be successfully fulfilled unless each member contributes to and understands the campaign planning stages and process on the same page and at the same pace.

- **Manager: Dr. Yan Jin**
- **Deputy Manager: Lauren A. Stewart**
- **Account Executives (2)**
 - Obtain business and maintain excellent client-agency relationship
 - Act as the liaison between the client and other units/work groups inside the agency
 - Act as liaison between designer and writer to ensure all work is cohesive and effective in addressing the client's needs
 - Lead agency project meetings
 - Submit call reports to the Manager and Deputy Manager
 - Create budget analysis and calendar
 - Organizing and leading oral presentations to the client
- **Researchers (2)**
 - In charge of research initiatives, including planning and implementation
 - Conduct primary research, such as focus groups, interviews and surveys (including survey item design and implementation, with assistance from the rest of the agency)
 - Conduct secondary research, such as database exploration
 - Compile research results and summarize the insights in situation analysis
 - Writes the evaluation section of the campaign plan in terms of how to measure whether each proposed objectives are achieved
- **Creative Direction**
 - **Writers (4)**
 - Recommend central theme and key messages of the campaign
 - Oversee all written communication (i.e. situation analysis, objectives, key messages, strategies, tactics, etc.)
 - Correspond with account executives to ensure all writing is cohesive with all elements of the campaign
 - Generate ideas for written communication and appendix items (i.e. press releases, copywriting for brochures, etc.)
 - Work closely with the designers to ensure all work is cohesive
 - Copyedit all written work of the campaign plan
 - Compile and format final campaign book
 - **Designers (4)**
 - Oversee and create all graphic design elements

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- Be in charge of the layout and delivery of the campaign book in all formats (print and electronic)
 - Works closely with the writers and account executives to ensure all work is cohesive.
 - Apply research insights to determine design initiatives and provide written rationale for each proposed design idea
- **Media Specialists**
 - **Media Relations and Community Outreach (2)**
 - Conduct media analysis
 - Draft press kit for the client
 - Work with account executives on media and community outreach
 - Identify media outlets and contacts for the best delivery of the campaign message
 - Recommend media campaign tactics
 - Plan and propose special events
 - **Interactive and Social Media (2)**
 - Work with the creative direction unit on choosing the optimal form of message delivery
 - Produce multimedia-story telling materials based on the written and graphic themes
 - Recommend and implement the social media tactics
 - Work with media relations specialists on how interactive and social media tactics can be integrated with traditional media outlets and tactics

Weekly Agency Meeting Schedule with Instructor

LOCATION: Classroom (Temple 1137)

FROM: January 26

TO: April 13

4-4:30: Account Executives' Call Report and Oral Brief

4:30-5: Account Executives with Instructor

5-5:30: Researcher Division with Instructor

5:30-6: Creative Division with Instructor

6-6:30: Media Division with Instructor

6:30-6:40: Summary and Conclusion

Public Relations Communication Campaigns -- Plan Check List

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Situation Analysis
 - Secondary Research Pertaining to Situation
 - Audits
 - a. Organizational Audit
 - b. Communication Audit
 - c. Public Relations Audit
 - d. Social Responsibility Audit *
 - SWOT Analysis
 - a. Strengths
 - b. Weaknesses
 - c. Opportunities
 - d. Threats
- Problem/Opportunity/Goal Statement(s)
- Research
 - Secondary Research Pertaining to Problem and/or Publics
 - Primary Research Pertaining to Problem and/or Publics
- Objectives
 - Measurable
 - Time-based
 - Bottom-line Oriented
- Key Publics
 - Derived from Research
 - Remaining Plan Components Customized for Publics
- Central Message/Theme
 - Tested
 - Sub-messages Resonate with Central Message
- Strategies
 - Rationale for Actions
 - Creative brief for advertising campaign
- Tactics/Action Plan
- Communication Channels, e.g.:
 - a. Advertising Media Plan
 - b. Media Contact List
 - c. Online & Offline Media
 - d. Social Media
 - e. Direct Mail/Email Plan
 - f. Special Event or Promotion Plan
- Schedule/Calendar
- Responsibility Chart
- Budget
- Evaluation

Appendices: calendars, cost estimates, worksheets, etc.

Tips for Campaigns Goals-Setting

The goals of your campaigns plan are the desired results that can be achieved through means of communication in order to help clients accomplish their overall organizational goals. Only after deciding your campaigns goals can you develop communication strategies, tactics, and evaluation plans that measure whether your goals are successfully realized. Think about what kind of goals you want to achieve and how you can measure them. Here are some examples:

- Increase Awareness (if you want your audience to see, hear, or read about your product or service or company/organization)
 - Use pre- and post-campaign surveys to see how many people have heard about your product/service or your organization and have been exposed to your messages).
- Increase Knowledge (if you want your audience to understand and know how your product/service works)
 - Use pre- and post-campaign surveys to see how many people know how your product/service is different from others.
- Increase Positive Attitude (if you want your audience like your product/service)
 - Use pre- and post-campaign surveys to see how many people like your product/service and how much they like it.
- Take Action (if you want your audience to try or to buy your product or use your service)
 - Use pre- and post-campaign surveys, sales information, redemption of coupons etc. to see how many people have purchased your product, how often they buy it, and how much they use it.

List of Communication Tools (for your tactics)

1. Backgrounder and factsheet (print and internet)
2. Brochure (print and internet)
3. Blog (written, video/audio)
4. E-mail campaign
5. Event
6. Feature
7. Instant messaging/texting
8. Leak
9. Letter to the editor
10. MMPOG (Massive Multiplay Online Games: Second Life, WOW)
11. News briefing (in person and NetBriefing)
12. News conference
13. News release (print and internet; includes multimedia news release)
14. Newsletter (print and internet)
15. Op-ed commentary
16. Pitch to news media (telephone, e-mail, letter, postcard)
17. Podcast (audio/video; internet and mobile)
18. Public service announcement (radio, TV, internet)
19. Satellite media tour and in person media tour
20. Social Networking (Facebook & MySpace)
21. Social Networking (Twitter and mrtweet.net, any site affiliated w/ Twitter)
22. Social Networking (all others beside the two listed above)
23. Speakers' bureau
24. Talk show
25. Video news release (VNR) and B-roll
26. Webcast (live and archival; full feature, audio only, PPT and audio)
27. White paper
28. A communication of your choice not listed here that I have approved in advance.
29. Search Engine Optimization

**VCU School of Mass Communications
Public Relations Campaign Portfolio Assessment Sheet**

1. Situation analysis based on primary and secondary research

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

2. Evaluation plan of communication objectives

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

3. Professional public relations plan/program writing

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

4. Visual communication components (effective use of PR graphics in producing organizational publications for the campaign)

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

5. Oral communication (professional presentation skills)

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

6. Identifying and prioritizing PR objectives from client’s business/organizational objectives

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

7. Development of PR strategies and tactics

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

8. Overall quality of the campaign book as a group product

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

9. Demonstrated equal contribution of individual team members

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

10. Professional handling of questions from client

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Call Report Template

The following is specific information about your Call Report. A sample format is below. This will be part of your final campaign book contribution documentation.

A Call Report is a summary of your progress, meetings or other conversations you have with your client, professor and others associated with the campaign each week. Call Reports are sometimes referred to as "Conference Reports." Call reports should include the following information: (1) your name, (2) team name, (3) time period, (4) agenda items discussed and next steps (5) questions and concerns.

Account Executives: The Weekly Call Reports are to be e-mailed to the Instructor (cc SLGTA) by noon, every Wednesday.

Date:

Attendees of meetings:

Absentee(s) and reason(s):

Report No. & Time Period for Report:

Agency Activities:

- Meeting date(s), attendees, agenda that identifies the role of each member (who led the meeting, recorded minutes, or the like)
- Review of progress since last report
- Topics discussed, concerns identified
- Assignments made to each member
- Group actions taken
- Other

Individual Activities:

- Assignments, other you worked on
- Your contributions
- Your assessment of your personal contributions to the meeting
- Other

Other Comments