

# CMN 5720: Seminar in Public Relations

## Strategic use of Symbols

### 3 credit hours - Fall 2017

Instructor: Matthew Gill, Ph.D.  
Time: Tuesday 7:00-9:30  
Room: Coleman 1731  
Office: Coleman 2070  
Phone: 581-6306 (office)  
E-mail: [mjgill@eiu.edu](mailto:mjgill@eiu.edu)  
Office hours: MWF 11:00-11:50  
                  M 1:00-1:50  
                  or by appointment

#### **Readings**

Available on D2L

#### **Course Description**

There once was a time when the study of public relations, particularly the academic study, was an amalgamation of social scientific constructs and theory building that emphasized the processes of communication. However, a number of public relations scholars began to argue (pretty loudly) that public relations was also about meaning, maybe primarily about meaning (works, such as *Unseen Power* by Scott Cutlip (1994), were emphasizing this point with vigor to say the least). Still, even today, much of the scholarly work is focused around variables and analytic discussions rather than addressing meaning and trying to understand how it is formed (at least this is true within the U.S. Works conducted outside the U.S. have emphasized a meaning based approach with much more enthusiasm). It is important to understand the “discussions relevant to the practice of public relations as being vital to the collective making of meaning that defines commercial transactions and relationships between organizations, between them and individuals, society, and their physical and social environments” (Heath, 2009, p.1). In order to appreciate the totality of public relations, we need to have insightful discussions of the way meaning is socially constructed and enacted. Whose interests are served? How do we balance competing or cooperating interests? Is it too narrowly self-interested? Are we creating enlightened choices? etc. When considering such questions, it becomes paramount that we understand how discourse plays a role in conflict, promotion, power and control, image, reputation, relationship management, and other factors of organizational success. This course is designed to expose you to the concept of organizational rhetoric and its consequences, such that no message, symbol, or action is incidental (though this does not necessarily evoke notions of good or bad...at least not yet). We must realize that public relations recognizes that perspective, persuasion, and advocacy are reoccurring themes which demand that messages are not only shared, but also interpreted and judged before decisions or conclusions are made. Class will consider conversations around metaphor, image, corporate apology, organizational identification, legitimacy, crisis communication, corporate sponsorship, power, and others.

## Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course:

1. You will be able to identify key public relations scholarship.
2. You will be able to critically assess public relations messages.
3. You will be able to address the ethical concerns regarding public relations.
4. You will be able to understand and assess how organizations speak and the ways in which they attempt to influence their key publics.

## Attendance

This is a grad class, so I just assume that you'll attend each session unless you have an emergency. You are expected to participate by reading the assigned materials on the day these materials are due and by contributing to class discussions. Because our class is collaborative in that we'll co-learn through discussion, your preparation of questions about course materials and your introduction of insights from other sources, including your work experience, are invaluable. Remember this is a seminar so we will discuss and play around with ideas together as a group. There will be no formal lecturing on my part. Everything we do will be in discussion format. Please never hesitate to speak up. Learning to jump into these discussions and to communicate and develop your ideas is one of the most important outcomes of this class. ***Don't be shy!*** Come to class prepared to question, to defend, to debate, to disagree, to apply, to integrate, to develop...etc.

## Completion of Assignments

It is assumed that you will turn your assignments in on time. All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date. All assignments should be proofread carefully before turning them in, and late work will result in a reduction of assignment grade. As a rule, late work will be reduced at least a letter grade. Excessively late work will not be accepted.

## Plagiarism and Cheating

For information on Eastern's policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty, please check EIU's current Academic Regulations in the undergraduate catalogue.

You are responsible for knowing the university policy on what constitutes academic dishonesty. Here is the short version: **ALWAYS** give credit—I will assume that everything you turn in (unless otherwise noted) is your own personal work, not borrowed work or group-created work. **It is important to remember that plagiarism is not based upon intent.** Just because it wasn't intentional or it was an accident does not mean that it was not plagiarism. It is!

If you turn in something without giving credit to others whose ideas or words you used, you will definitely receive a 0 for the assignment; additional consequences can include failure of the course and even expulsion from the university. If you collaborate with someone else on an assignment and turn in substantially similar work, you are both guilty of plagiarism. If you turn in something written by someone else, expect to fail the course and be reported to the Dean of Students. Do your own work. Give credit where credit is due.

### **Academic integrity**

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>).

Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

### **Students with disabilities**

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

### **The Student Success Center**

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time management, text taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

### **Booth Library**

Located in the center of campus, Booth Library is the best place to do research, find expert help, or study in a calm, distraction-free environment. In addition to the many print resources, Booth provides access to high quality e-books, journals and scholarship not freely available on the Web. Stop by the Reference Desk or go to <http://library.eiu.edu> to explore library resources. Get expert help with your research by contacting the Booth Library reference librarians. Visit, call 581-6072, or go to <http://booth.eiu.edu/ask> to connect with a librarian.

### **Cell Phones**

Please turn off or silence your cell phone before class. If there is some sort of situation in which you need to keep your phone on please consult with me before class. Otherwise there's no reason I should even see your phone. Please do not spend your class time text messaging or on your phone in any way.

### **Email**

You should use your university email account or D2L to contact me with any matters concerning class. Mail sent from other email addresses may be filtered out by the Eastern system. Therefore, I may not receive your message if you don't use your university account.

You are expected to check your email on a frequent and consistent basis in order to stay current with departmental and course communications. Students have the responsibility to recognize that certain communications may be time-critical. "I didn't check my email", error in foreign mail accounts, or email returned to the department/instructor with "mailbox full" or "user unknown" are not acceptable excuses for missing department/course communication sent via email.

## **Course Requirements**

**Synthesis Papers:** You will be expected to write two synthesis papers throughout the semester. The synthesis papers are intended to help you start integrating and applying the material you have read for the class. Synthesis papers should be 3-4 pages or so double-spaced and should be a discussion of a subject area introduced in the readings or class discussion. These papers might:

1. Evaluate some aspect of course content and its implications.
2. Explain the course content you most agree/disagree with and why.
3. Explain the things you most want to alert/inform the reader and why it is important

You have wide latitude in determining what you want to write about. There is no right or wrong. Instead, these pieces provide you a chance to more deeply investigate or challenge some aspect of class material. The emphasis is on originality of thought and rigor of analysis, as well as insight into public relations theory and the linkages between rhetorical advocacy and other areas of the discipline.

**Discussion Leader:** Every student will be assigned two readings during one week of the class. You will give a brief overview of the readings (you can prepare a handout as a guide if you like, but this is not required) and facilitate discussion on those readings. Before class you will email 10-15 critical discussion questions to your classmates (and me) on D2L. These questions should be posted at least 48 hours before the class meeting (i.e., by SUNDAY at 7:00 pm). Each student is expected to have thought about the questions, and have points prepared for class discussion. Discussion leaders will lead the discussion, ask **additional** questions (not just the ones you've prepared), and incorporate any additional activities, cases, or research they may have on the topic. You'll have control of the class so it is important that you come knowledgeable and prepared. Each discussion leader will lead class for at least 75 minutes (I may allow it to go longer depending on the how the discussion is proceeding).

## **Final Project/Case Study**

You will write one research paper for this class in the form of a critical case study. This research project requires you to choose a specific case relevant to public relations, research that case, determine which sources to incorporate for your analysis (literature review), and then provide a thoughtful analysis and draw significant conclusions.

Your paper should be of conference quality and in APA style. Your paper should run around 10-12 pages of text, including endnotes but excluding references (15-20 on the small side), tables, appendices, title page, and abstract page.

You want to choose a case that has concluded (ongoing cases require more speculation about consequences than I want to see in this paper). You should assert and develop an original argument about the PR in the case and then use your literature review to support your argument and as the basis for your analysis/evaluation. To do that well you will

need to include and utilize examples from the case. You can't just say X or Y happened – you need to show it. Your reader is a skeptical and critical audience – one example means nothing. Develop and support your claims through a multitude of evidence.

This is NOT a storytelling exercise. While communicating what happened is extremely important for your reader (and therefore you need to do it well) the entire point of the paper is for you to put forth and develop an original argument about the PR in the case. What does your analysis teach us about PR? What lessons can we learn from reading this case? What worked/failed? Etc. Your thesis needs to drive home exactly what your argument is and what the take away from the paper will be (assuming after reading the paper you've convinced the reader to accept your argument).

### **Determination of Final Grade**

- Contributions to Class Discussion 10%
- Discussion Leader 15%
- Synthesis Paper 1 15%
- Synthesis Paper 2 15%
- Synthesis Paper 3 15%
- Final Project/Case Study 30%

## **Tentative course schedule**

### **Week 1: August 22 - Introduction and Expectations**

- Ihlen, O., & van Ruler, B. (2007). How public relations works: Theoretical roots and public relations perspectives. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 243-248.
- Bates, D. (2006). "Mini-me" history: Public relations from the dawn of civilization. Retrieved from <http://www.instituteforpr.org>
- Ihlen, O., & Verhoeven, P. (2012). A public relations identity for the 2010s. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1, 159-176.

### **Week 2: August 29 – Theoretical foundations**

- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A. & Dozier, D. M. (2006). The excellence theory. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazelton (Eds.), *Public relations theory II*, (pp. 20-62). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pfau, M. & Wan, H. (2006). Persuasion: An intrinsic function of public relations. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazelton (Eds.), *Public relations theory II*, (pp. 64-101). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Heath, R. L. (2000). A rhetorical perspective on the values of public relations: Crossroads and pathways toward concurrence. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(1), 69-91.
- Heath, R. L. (2009). The rhetorical tradition: The wrangle in the marketplace. In R. L. Heath, E. L. Toth, & D. M. Waymer (Eds.), *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations II*, (pp.17-47).

### **Week 3: September 5 – Organizational Rhetoric**

- Cheney, G., & McMillan, J. J. (1990). Organizational rhetoric and the practice of criticism. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 18(2), 93-114.
- Hoffman, M. F., & Ford, D. J. (2010). *Organizational rhetoric: Situations and strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Ch 1).
- Hoffman, M. F., & Ford, D. J. (2010). *Organizational rhetoric: Situations and strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Ch 2).
- Boyd, J. (2001). The rhetoric of arrogance: The public relations response of the Standard Oil Trust. *Public Relations Review*, 27, 163-178.

#### **Week 4: September 12 – Organizational Rhetoric continued...**

##### **Synthesis Paper 1 Due**

- Eisenberg, E. M. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 227-242.
- Dionosopoulos, G. N., & Crable, R. E. (1988). Definitional hegemony as a public relations strategy: The rhetoric of the nuclear power industry after Three Mile island. *Central States Speech Journal*, 39, 134-145.
- Farrell, T. B., & Goodnight, G. T. (1981). Accidental rhetoric: The root metaphors of Three Mile Island, *Communication Monographs*, 48, 271-300.
- Boyd, J. (2003). A quest for Cinergy: The war metaphor and the construction of identity. *Communication Studies*, 54, 249-264.

#### **Week 5: September 19 – Narrative**

- Fisher, W.R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 1-22.
- Fisher, W.R. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs*, 52, 347-367.
- Lucaites, J.L., & Condit, C.M. (1985). Re-constructing narrative theory: A functional perspective. *Journal of Communication*, 35, 90-108.
- Boje, D.M. (1991). The storytelling organization: A study of story performance in an office-supply firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, 106-126.

#### **Week 6: September 26 – Storytelling**

- Gilpin, D.R. (2008). Narrating the organizational self: Reframing the role of the news release. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 9-18.
- Kent, M. L. (2015). The power of storytelling in public relations: Introducing the 20 master plots. *Public Relations Review*, 41, 480-489.
- Wehmeier, S., & Schulz, F. (2014) – Communication and corporate social responsibility: A storytelling perspective. In O. Ihlen, J. Bartlett, & S. May (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*. (pp. 467-488).
- Heath (2004) – Telling a story: A narrative approach to communication during a crisis. In D.P. Miller & R.L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication*, (pp. 167-187).

## **Week 7: October 3 – Storytelling/Narrative techniques**

### **Synthesis Paper 2 Due**

- Boje, D., Driver, M., & Cai, Y. (2005). Fiction and human in transforming McDonald's narrative strategies. *Culture and Organization*, 11, 195-208.
- Denning, S. (2006). Effective storytelling: Strategic business narrative techniques. *Strategy & Leadership*, 34, 42-48.
- Marzec, M. (2007). Telling the corporate story: Vision into action. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 28, 26-36.
- Black, H.G., & Kelley, S.W. (2009). A storytelling perspective on online customer reviews reporting service failure and recovery. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 26, 169-179.
- Adamson, G., Pine, J., Van Steenhoven, T., & Kroupa, J. (2006). How storytelling can drive strategic change. *Strategy & Leadership*, 34, 36-41.
- Papadatos, C. (2006). The art of storytelling: How loyalty marketers can build emotional connections to their brands. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 23, 382-384.

## **Week 8: October 10 – Identification**

- Cheney, G. (1991). *Rhetoric in an organizational society: Managing multiple identities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (pp. 1-33).
- Cheney, G. (1983). The rhetoric of identification and the study of organizational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 69, 143-158.
- Cheney, G., & Tompkins, P. K. (1987). Coming to terms with organizational identification and commitment. *Central States Speech Journal*, 38, 1-15.
- Hoffman, M. F., & Ford, D. J. (2010). *Organizational rhetoric: Situations and strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Ch. 6).

## **Week 9: October 17 – NO CLASS**



### **Week 10: October 24 – Legitimacy**

- Metzler, M. S. (2001). The centrality of organizational legitimacy to public relations practice. In R. L. Heath & G. Vasquez (Eds.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 321-333). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dowling, J., & Pfeffer, J. (1975). Organizational legitimacy: Social values and organizational behavior. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 18, 122-136.
- Boyd, J. (2000). Actional legitimation: No crisis necessary. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(4), 341-353.
- Le, J., & Bartlett, J.L. (2014). Managing impressions during institutional change – The role of organizational accounts in legitimation. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3, 341-360.

### **Week 11: October 31 – NO CLASS**

### **Week 12: November 7 – Social Responsibility**

- Ihlen, O., Bartlett, J., & May, S. (2014). Corporate social responsibility and communication. In O. Ihlen, J. Bartlett, & S. May (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*. (pp. 3-22).
- Bartlett, J. (2014). Public relations and corporate social responsibility. In O. Ihlen, J. Bartlett, & S. May (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*. (pp. 67-86).
- Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2014). Corporate social responsibility communication and dialogue. In O. Ihlen, J. Bartlett, & S. May (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*. (pp. 231-251).
- Ihlen, O. (2009). Good environmental citizens?: The green rhetoric of corporate social responsibility. In R. L. Heath, E. L. Toth, & D. M. Waymer (Eds.), *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations II*, (pp.360-374).

### **Week 13: November 14 – Sponsorship**

#### **Synthesis Paper 3 Due**

- Cornwell, T. B. (2008). State of the art and science in sponsorship-linked marketing. *Journal of Advertising*, 37(3), 41-55.
- Meenaghan, T. (2001). Understanding sponsorship effects. *Psychology and Marketing*, 18, 95-122.
- McAllister, M. P. (1998). College bowl sponsorship and the increased commercialization of amateur sports. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 15, 357-381.
- Boyd, J. (2000). Selling home: Corporate stadium names and the destruction of commemoration. *Applied Communication Research*, 28(4), 330-346.

### **Week 14: November – NO CLASS – Thanksgiving break**

### **Week 15: November 28 – Stakeholders**

- Ni, L., & Kim, J. (2009). Classifying publics: Communication behaviors and problem-solving characteristics in controversial issues. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 3, 217-241.
- Ledingham, J.A. (2008). A chronology of organization-stakeholder relationships with recommendations concerning practitioner adoption of the relational perspective. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 14, 243-262.
- Kruckeberg, D., & Vujnovic, M. (2010). The death of the concept of publics (plural) in 21<sup>st</sup> century public relations. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 4, 117-125.
- Moon, S.J., & Hyun, K.D. (2009). The salience of stakeholders and their attributes in public relations and business news. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24, 59-75.
- Waters, R.D., & Bortree, D.S. (2012). Advancing relationship management theory: Mapping the continuum of relationship types. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 123-127.

## **Week 16: December 5 – Evaluation and research based decisions**

- Michaelson, D., Wright, D.K., & Stacks, D.W. (2012). Evaluating efficacy in public relations/corporate communication programming: Towards establishing standards of campaign performance. *Public Relations Journal*, 6, Retrieved from <http://www.instituteforpr.org>
- Paine, K.D., Draper, P., & Jeffrey, A. (2008). Using public relations research to drive business results. Retrieved from <http://www.instituteforpr.org>
- Watson, T. (2012). The evolution of public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 390-398.
- Thurlow, A., Kushniryk, A., Yue, A.R., Blanchette, K., Murchland, P., & Simon, A. (2017). Evaluating excellence: A model of evaluation for public relations practice in organizational culture and context. *Public Relations Review*, 43, 71-79.
- Volk, S.C. (2016). A systematic review of 40 years of public relations evaluation and measurement research: Looking into the past, the present, and future. *WeePublic Relations Review*, 42, 962-977.

**Tuesday, December 12, 7:30 pm – FINAL PROJECTS DUE**