



COMM 4352
Special Topics: Internet and Social Media for Public Relations

St. Edward's University • Department of Communication

Section 01 • Spring 2009 • TH 205 • MW 2:00 – 3:15 p.m.
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Office Hours: TR: 3:00-5:00 p.m. and by appointment

Required Textbooks:

McConnell, B. & Huba, J. (2006). *Citizen Marketers: When People Are the Message*. Kaplan Business.

Breakenridge, D. (2008). *PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson

* As part of your readings for class, you will also be required to listen to a number of podcasts. These podcasts consist of interviews with PR and marketing professionals, technology specialists, and South by Southwest panel discussions. All podcasts can be accessed through Blackboard.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In April 2006, Richard Edelman, CEO of the largest independently owned PR firm in the world, told an audience of PR professionals that:

“The media, communications, and marketing landscape in which the public relations industry was developed is being knocked down [...] It is the decline of media based on a top-down model of communications. In this model, a small group of elites are briefed in advance with messages that are too often tightly scripted to brief the national newspaper, broadcast networks and newsmagazines. The message is then simplified and communicated to a mass audience via advertising or as “earned” editorial. This model is premised on the audience being passive receptors for the message [...] In the emerging model, as epitomized by YouTube, MySpace, Oh My News and Wikipedia, ordinary people provide content to others. Ideas and information are passed virally. This consumer generated content alters the laws of control of message. Many are calling this new social and user driven media ‘Web 2.0.’”

In this course, we will explore emerging social media technologies and study their application in contemporary PR practice. We will not only examine these technologies from a theoretical perspective by reading scholarly research and writings from PR professionals, but we will also learn how to use and author content for such online PR tools ourselves. Topics we will cover include: social media and Web 2.0, blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds, viral video, social bookmarking, social media news releases, and other emerging web technologies.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As a result of taking this class, you will:

- ❖ Understand how the PR industry is incorporating new media and social media technologies into contemporary PR practice
- ❖ Understand the need to stay abreast of advances in communication technology in order to succeed as a PR professional
- ❖ Learn how to locate the information and the technical know-how to help you stay abreast of those advances
- ❖ Learn to create and adapt video, audio, and text for online PR tools
- ❖ Be able to produce webpages, blogs, and podcasts for communications campaigns
- ❖ Be able to critically discuss the effects of the use of computer-mediated communication within the corporate and nonprofit environments served by the PR industry

PORTFOLIO OBJECTIVES

This class fulfills the following communication portfolio objectives:

- ❖ **Leadership** – Course content mastery will require students to take the initiative in their own learning and spent time outside regular scheduled class hours to familiarize themselves with new social media technologies.
- ❖ **Written communication** – This will be a writing-intensive class. Students will practice both collaborative and individual writing. Each student will host a PR blog, comment on other students' blogs, and join classmates in creating and editing pages for a class wiki.
- ❖ **Use of technology** – This course will familiarize students with the newest social media technologies and teach them how to author and publish social media content themselves. More importantly, it will show them how to locate the information and technical know-how to stay abreast of the ever-changing media landscape.
- ❖ **Group communication** – To stay true to the spirit of social media, students will collaborate in the creation and evaluation of a body of knowledge on social media. Students will be expected to contribute original ideas and to enter into a critical conversation about those ideas with other students.
- ❖ **Theoretical perspective** – In their blog and wiki contributions, students will examine a variety of theoretical perspectives on social media technologies and will be evaluated based on their ability to apply these theories to real world PR examples.
- ❖ **Professionalism** – The blogging project will require students to develop their constructive criticism skills and to respond to peer criticism in a productive manner.

COURSE POLICIES

1. Attendance

Number of absences. Attendance at each class is required. Each time you are absent from class counts as one absence. If you arrive more than 10 minutes late to class, you will be marked absent for that day. After your second absence, your final grade will be reduced by three percentage points for each additional absence.

Excused absences. If you have a valid and unavoidable reason for missing class, you may submit a completed *Excused Absence Request* along with a two page (at least 500 words) chapter summary / discussion for the material you missed. Your excused absence request and chapter summary must be turned in within a week after your return to class. The request form is available on Blackboard

under Course Documents. A separate request form and additional chapter summary / discussion must be submitted for each absence. You will also need to provide me with proper documentation for your absence (such as a doctor's note, a hospitalization record, a university excuse, or an athletic excuse). All documentation must be turned in by the last day of class for the excuses to be considered. After review of your request I will determine whether the excuse will be granted.

If you are involved in athletics or another school-sanctioned activity that requires you to miss this class, please give me appropriate supporting material signed by the sponsor. Please underline or highlight the specific dates that involve this class. If changes occur throughout the semester after you have given me a schedule, please keep me updated.

Attendance sheet. After the first week of class, it is your responsibility to sign the roll sheet each class period. Be sure to do so, as this is the official record of your attendance in class.

Withdrawal for absences. I reserve the right to "WA" any student with more than 6 absences. Please note that this does not mean that I will automatically "WA" you if you risk to fail the class. It is your responsibility to initiate drop procedures if you are in danger of failing this class.

2. Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty includes cheating on exams as well as plagiarizing (presenting another's work as your own). Cheating comes in all different shades—ranging from blatant copying off another's exam/bringing a 'cheat sheet' to class to more subtle forms of 'borrowing' a few ideas and not citing your sources—all of which will be treated with the same level of seriousness in this class. The St. Edward's University Undergraduate Bulletin and the Student Handbook state that a student who is dishonest in any work may receive the maximum penalty of a mark of F for that course. Withdrawal from a course is not allowed when an F in the course for academic dishonesty has been imposed. Students caught committing academic dishonesty in this course will be subject to the full range of penalties as described in the Undergraduate Bulletin and in the Student Handbook.

* A note on my expectations for your writing: I want to see you express your own thoughts in your own words in this class. I therefore expect each blog post or wiki entry to be your own writing, and not a collection of cut and pasted pieces from other people's writings. You know the rules: if you need to cite someone, use quotation marks and credit the source.

3. Courtesy Rules regarding Cell Phone and Computer Use

Cell phones: As a courtesy to your instructor and to your classmates, please make sure at the beginning of each class period that your cell phones and pagers are turned off.

In-class computer use: You may use a computer to take notes in class. However, in-class computer usage is restricted to taking notes about this particular class. Writing papers for other classes, surfing the Internet, checking email, visiting Facebook, or other such distractions are prohibited. If you choose to take notes on a computer, you will need to enter your notes directly on the Blackboard class wiki (if you wish to share them with the class) or on your Blackboard blog (if you don't wish to share them). Alternatively, you can type them up in a Word processor and copy them into the wiki or blog at the end of class. Each class period I will note who is using a computer to take notes and check the notes at the end of class. Any student who was using a computer but failed to add his/her notes to the wiki or blog by the end of class, or added incomplete notes will be

counted as absent for that day. Please note that after your second absence, your final grade will be reduced by three percentage points for each additional absence (see attendance policy above).

If you will not be taking notes on a computer, do not log in to the computers once class has started unless otherwise instructed. Should you be logged into the computer once class has started, you will be counted as absent for that day.

4. Assignments

All assignments must be word-processed and turned in on time. Our blog server will automatically log the time you submitted your posts and comments. I will use the server time stamp to determine whether or not an assignment was submitted on time. Late work will result in a 10% grade reduction for each day (not class period) it is late. Please note that I will **NOT** accept any emailed assignments. If you are absent from class on a day an assignment is due, you are still expected to submit your assignment that day by uploading it to the blog server.

5. Email Policy

I check email once per day, usually in the afternoon, and I will get back with you as soon as possible. Please note that I do not return email over the weekend.

6. Grades

If you are not doing as well as you had anticipated, please don't hesitate to come talk to me so that we can discuss how you might improve your performance on the remaining assignments.

Grading Scale

A+ = 100	A = 95	A- = 92
B+ = 88	B = 85	B- = 82
C+ = 78	C = 75	C- = 72
D+ = 68	D = 65	D- = 62
F = 50		

Course Grade

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	Below 60

7. Special Accommodations

If you have a medical, psychiatric or learning disability and require accommodations in this class, please let me know early in the semester or as soon as you are eligible. You will first need to provide documentation of your disability to the Student Disability Services Office located in Moody Hall 155 in Academic Planning and Support Services. Please note that special accommodations cannot be made retroactively.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Blog Posts	200 (20%)
Blog Comments	150 (15%)
Podcast Project	100 (10%)
Webvideo Project	100 (10%)
Participation	50 (5%)
Exam #1	100 (10%)
Exam #2	150 (15%)
Final Exam	150 (15%)

BLOGGING PROJECT: BLOG POSTS

In order to get a feel for the social media technologies we will be discussing in this class, you will need to learn how to use all of them first. Since we will be talking a lot about blogs, you will be required to launch your own PR blog and to post to it throughout the semester. At the end of the course, your blog will document your progress and growth throughout the semester.

Your blog posts will be worth 20% of your final grade (10% for work done by midterm, and 10% for work done by the last week of classes). You are required to make two blog posts a week (for purposes of this assignment, weeks start on Monday and end on Sunday):

- One of those posts will be a reaction to the week's reading and/or class material.
- The other one will be an original post in which you discuss interesting usages of social media that you stumbled across, or examine new social media technologies. You can also share your thoughts on how the PR industry is using/should use social media, or on how communication theories can be applied to social media PR practice. As you can tell, pretty much any topic is fair game for the second post as long as it pertains to the class. The idea is to get you to engage the course material critically and to have you keep your eyes open for interesting material to blog about. I want you to become an active learner and to start being on the lookout for material to incorporate into the class instead of relying on me, as the instructor, to tell you what is important.

Deliverables:

- 2 posts a week - it doesn't matter what day of the week you blog.
- Use tags to identify the week you wrote your blog post and whether it is an original post or a reaction to the reading. For instance, the tag "week3r" means that this is your reaction to the readings for week 3 and "week3o" means that this is your original post for week 3.
- Use other appropriate tags to describe each post
- Link to the sources you use in your post & credit them

Please note that you will not receive credit for:

- Posts that don't relate to social media or PR
- Posts that simply announce a new service/technology without examining it
- Posts that were added late (you need to blog on a regular, weekly basis)
- Posts that contain inappropriate language. Remember, your blog reflects your personal brand and is indexed by search engines. You don't want to create a negative online identity. Please refer to our discussion of blogging etiquette or talk to me if you have further questions about this.

Grading Criteria:

1. Post is substantive (thoroughly developed)
2. Post is well written (organization, grammar, spelling)
3. Post demonstrates your understanding of the topic/issue
4. Created required amount of posts
5. Fulfills all the requirements listed above

BLOGGING PROJECT: BLOG COMMENTS

In the blogosphere, commenting is a way to initiate a conversation around a topic. You are required to leave two comments a week and to keep a log of where you commented. I expect you to leave substantive comments that either extend other bloggers' arguments, contradict them, or provide some new insight into the topic. Your blog comments will be worth 15% of your final grade.

You can comment on:

- Your classmates' blogs
- The blogs of social media students from classes around the world we will be collaborating with this semester (list to be published on BB and the course blog)
- The blogs of PR and marketing professionals

Two notes on blog comments:

- I expect substance here. No two-word type comments à la "great post", "good job", "I totally agree with you", etc. If you agree/disagree, explain yourself. The goal is to add value to the original post and to deepen the conversation.
- I also expect civility. No intentional provocations/expletives/obscenities, etc. If you disagree with a post, do so politely. Again, the idea is to start a civil, but also critical conversation. We don't all have to agree with one another, but I do expect you to respect one another.

Comment log:

Please note that it is absolutely essential for you to keep track of where you leave comments and to collect those comments in a log, which you will hand in at the end of the semester. For each comment you leave, your log should contain the:

- name of the blog you commented on
- the URL of the blog post you commented on
- the date of your comment
- the actual comment

Grading Criteria:

1. Comments are substantive (add value to the post)
2. Comments invite a conversation/reflection
3. Created required amount of comments
4. Comment log contains all the required information (listed above)

PODCAST PROJECT

For this project you will work in a team of 3. Your assignment is to produce a 5-10 minute podcast on an issue pertaining to this class. You can either interview an expert on the topic of social media and make that interview available in form of a podcast, or discuss a social media & PR issue in your group and edit that discussion into a podcast.

The goal of this project is two-fold: (1) to produce a meaningful audio resource on the topic of social media, and (2) to demonstrate that you possess the necessary skills to produce a podcast. You will be evaluated both on the content and the technical quality of the podcast.

The specific topic of your interview or your group discussion will depend on the area of expertise of your interviewee and/or your own area of interest. This is your time to be creative! If you decide to interview an outside source, be sure to develop your interview questions ahead of your interview and to phrase your questions in such a way as to avoid simple yes/no type answers.

Requirements:

- Create a 5-10 minute podcast and burn an RSS feed
- Create a blog post about your podcast which links to the podcast, contains the show notes, and is tagged for effective search engine exposure

Grading Criteria:

Interview Content

1. Questions invite in-depth exploration of social media issues
2. Chosen expert has credibility in topic area

(or) Group Discussion Content

1. Discussion explored social media issue in-depth
2. Members came across as credible by citing/discussing relevant research

Technical Quality

3. Podcast is well edited (use of bumpers & jingles, clean cuts)
4. Audio quality is good (adjusted volume, quality recording)

Overall Requirements

5. Fulfills the 2 requirements listed above

WEB VIDEO

Social media technologies have not only made it easier to upload user-generated content to the web, but they have also given us new ways of expressing our opinions and sharing them with others. While the blogging project is requiring you to express yourself through writing, the web video project will allow you to make your points visually.

Since knowledge of video editing wasn't a pre-requisite for this class and proper video-editing instruction could easily take up a whole semester, we will only be able to cover the basics in the few class periods we have set aside for this project.

For this project, you will pick a social issue of importance to you and produce a 60 second web video (needs to be EXACTLY 60 seconds) that strives to raise awareness about that issue. This is your chance to be creative and to make a video that will grab the attention of the on-line community. The goal is to make a top rated viral video that creates a real buzz and gets people thinking about the social issue you picked.

Your job will be to develop a creative idea, obtain footage (pics and/or video), edit the video, add sound and text, format it for web distribution, and post it to your blog. If you choose to use pictures or video you didn't shoot yourself, you absolutely have to adhere to all copyright restrictions. Do not use any material you do not have the rights to. There are a number of resources for locating free stock photos and images on the course blog and we will discuss how to search for certain Creative Commons licenses on photo sharing sites.

Basic Requirements for a C:

- Create a 60 second video (needs to be EXACTLY 60 seconds) which raises awareness of a social issue
- Observe all copyright restrictions if using material that isn't yours
- Create a blog post about your video which
 - (1) embeds the video,
 - (2) describes your creative idea in no less than 400 words
 - (3) and is tagged for effective search engine exposure

Grading Criteria:

1. Video is well edited (smooth & appropriate transitions, synchronized audio track & text)
2. Video quality is good (not too grainy)
3. Audio quality is good (edited correctly, proper volume)
4. Video is creative and draws attention to the issue
5. Video is embedded on the blog with proper tags
6. Video is exactly 60 seconds long
7. Blog post about video contains a 400 word discussion of the creative idea behind the video

PARTICIPATION

Your participation grade in this class will consist of in-class activities, occasional homework assignments and your contributions to the class – both verbal and in the form of social bookmarks. All participation activities are graded on a pass/fail basis. There are no make-ups for in-class assignments.

EXAMS

There will be 3 exams based on material from your assigned texts, lectures, and class discussions. Exams will be made up of multiple-choice and brief essay questions. Exams can only be made up with an official doctor's excuse or university note.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

CM = Citizen Marketers; PR = PR 2.0; BB = Blackboard

Week 1

Mon., 01/12: Welcome & Course Intro

Wed., 01/14: Social media, Web 2.0 & the semantic web
Readings: SXSW Podcast on Web 2.0 (BB)

Week 2

Mon., 01/19: **No Class – MLK Holiday**

Wed., 01/21: Setting up blogs & SEO
Readings: intro & ch. 3 (CM)
** HW: Identify research interest & bring topic to class*

Week 3

Mon., 01/26: RSS & Setting up Feed Readers
Readings: ch. 9 (PR)

Wed., 01/28: Blogging Etiquette, Online Identity & Personal Brand
Readings: Pew Study part 1, 3 & 5 (BB)

Week 4 – First blog posts & comments due

Mon., 02/02: Clue Train Manifesto & In-Class Blogging
Readings: 99 theses & critique (BB); ch. 1 (PR)

Wed., 02/04: Social Bookmarks & its PR Uses
Readings: The Wisdom Of Crowds That Organizes The Web (BB) & PR Squared -
Using del.icio.us for Thought Leadership (BB)

Week 5 – Number of blog posts: 4; Number of blog comments: 4

Mon., 02/09: Social Bookmarks In-Class Activity: The Perfect Match
Readings: Several Habits of Wildly Successful del.icio.us Users (BB)

Wed., 02/11: Wikis & the participatory web
Readings: ch. 2 (CM)

Week 6 – Number of blog posts: 5; Number of blog comments: 5

Mon., 02/16: **Exam #1**

Wed., 02/18: Microblogging as a PR tool: Twitter
Readings: ch. 4 (CM)

Week 7 – Number of blog posts: 7; Number of blog comments: 7

Mon., 02/23: Corporate & nonprofit blogging
Readings: ch. 4 (PR)
** Assign podcasting project & groups*

Wed., 02/25: Blogger Relations
Readings: Brian Solis' Ebook (BB); ch. 13 (PR)

Week 8 – Number of blog posts: 9; Number of blog comments: 9

Mon., 03/02: The key players in social media
Readings: ch. 1 (CM)

Wed., 03/04: Tracking & monitoring conversations
Readings: ch. 5 (PR)

Week 9– Number of blog posts: 11; Number of blog comments: 11

Mon., 03/09: Podcasting as a PR tool
Readings: ch. 12 (PR)

Wed., 03/11: Producing podcasts
Readings: SXSW Podcast on Podcasts (BB)

Week 10 – No blogs/comments due this week

Mon., 03/16: **No Class – Spring Break**

Wed., 03/18: **No Class – Spring Break**

Week 11 – Number of blog posts: 12; Number of blog comments: 12

Mon., 03/23: Social Media Scavenger Hunt/ Exam Review
Readings: ch. 11 (PR)

Wed., 03/25: **Exam #2**

Week 12 – Number of blog posts: 14; Number of blog comments: 14

Mon., 03/30: Burning a podcast feed & podcast critiques
**Podcasts due at the beginning of class (bring MP3 file)*

Wed., 04/01: Social networks as a PR tool: Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.
Readings: ch. 8 (PR) & SXSW panel on social networking & branding (BB)
** Assign video project*

Week 13 – Number of blog posts: 16; Number of blog comments: 16

Mon., 04/06: Virtual Worlds as a PR tool: Second Life
Readings: NYTimes - How Second Life Affects Real Life (BB) & Steve Rubel on 'Second Life' Public Relations (BB)

Wed., 04/08: Viral video and its use as a PR & marketing tool
Readings: ch. 5 & 6 (CM)

Week 14 – Number of blog posts: 18; Number of blog comments: 18

Mon., 04/13: **No Class – Easter Break**

Wed., 04/15: Producing video for the web & cloud computing
Readings: ch. 6 & 10 (PR)

Week 15 – Last week of blogging: Number of blog posts: 20; Number of blog comments: 20

Mon., 04/20: Social Media News Release

Readings: ch. 7 (PR); Formeski & Defren (BB)

**Video due at the beginning of class (embed on blog)*

Wed., 04/22: Social Media as Crisis Comm. Tools

Readings: Reinventing Crisis Communications for the Social Web (BB)

Week 16

Mon., 04/27: Course Evals & Exam Review

Wed., 04/29: **No Class – PRSA Digital Impact Conference**

Final Exam:

Thursday, May 7th from 1:30 - 3:30 pm