**PR 504: Strategic Public Relations Research, Evaluation and Insights**

**3 Units**

**Class Hashtag for Twitter: #USCPR504**

**Fall 2018 – Tuesdays – 6:30-9 p.m.**

**Section:** 21317D

**Location:** ASC 230

**Instructor: Michelle Sherman**

**Office Hours:** By Appointment on Tuesdays immediately prior to class; or other mutually scheduled times

**Contact Info:** [m7sherman@gmail.com](mailto:m7sherman@gmail.com) or sher052@usc.edu; (818) 730-5996 (cell)

**I. Course Description**

A major component of the public relations practitioner’s work is to find and utilize facts, figures and opinions in a thoughtful and productive manner. Successful practitioners can observe and examine an array of information ranging from consumer perceptions to voting trends and spending habits and, in turn, draw useful conclusions. This course is designed to introduce students to the research and evaluation tools available to them as tomorrow’s public relations practitioners. The goal of the class is to produce professionals who understand the need to measure and evaluate all communications efforts. Students will leave the course prepared to evaluate assignments they encounter as professional practitioners; find, interpret, synthesize and present research, to direct a research project, and to package and present research. In the first part of the course, you will gain a toolkit of research methodologies and analysis techniques that you can apply in a variety of professional contexts. We will then apply that toolkit to a series of real world data collections, culminating in the presentation of a semester-long project that includes team and individual components.

**II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

• Understand the basic tenets of public relations research

• Demystify research and data analysis for various stakeholders

• Match research/findings to an organization’s business objectives

• Identify an array of target audiences and create appropriate research design/questions to analyze them

• Provide accurate and quantifiable evaluation of public relations techniques/campaigns

• Investigate and use social media monitoring tools

• Conduct a thorough competitive analysis

• Package and present research findings for an array of stakeholders

**III. Description of Assignments**

Classes will generally consist of the following components:

• Lectures

• Discussion

• Student presentations

• Hands on application of the concepts through real and hypothetical situations

**Note: It is important to attend class and actively participate, since class activities and interaction with peers encourage creative dialogue and diversity of perspective, and help enhance your learning. It is expected that students will come to class having read the assignment(s) and prepared to join class discussions, contributing questions and comments about the materials.** Classes begin promptly, so please arrive on time. If you are unable to attend class for some reason, please notify me as soon as possible, and assume personal responsibility for gathering notes from other classmates. At the end of the semester, points will be allocated to students based upon:

* Consistent demonstration that they have read the material for scheduled class discussion
* Contribution to class discussion; answering questions, asking relevant questions
* Demonstrating respect for fellow classmates, guest speakers, and instructor (including appropriate use of personal technologies during classroom time)
* Mature classroom behavior that supports learning

You will be expected to sign up for a Qualtrics account (free to USC students) for use around mid-semester, but it’s a good idea to establish your account early.

**Assignment summaries**

**Bringing data-related news articles to class.** Students are expected to bring a data-related news article to class and be prepared to present on it for two class sessions that they will have signed up for in advance, in addition to other classes as assigned by Professor Sherman. This assignment is designed to help students become sensitive to the tremendous secondary research that is available to them from news articles, and also see firsthand how surveys, polls and the various research approaches we are studying are used to support a position or engage in public advocacy for some viewpoint or initiative. From this assignment, students can also identify secondary sources that they may want to use for their group research project. Some examples of data-related news articles can be found by searching on Twitter using the class hashtag, #USCPR504 (or through a prior course hashtag, #USCPR463).

**Short written assignments.** Throughout the course, you will be assigned short written assignments designed to evaluate your understanding of course content. Some of these assignments will be completed in class while others you’ll need to do outside of class time. Assignments will be posted on Blackboard under “Assignments”, and will include the details of the task and a grading rubric that will explain how the assignment will be evaluated. In addition, quizzes and in class projects will affect your participation grade.

**Group research project and individual research report.** The final project in this course is a group research project. Together with your group, you will produce your own empirical study of some aspect related to a product, brand, issue (your “Client”). This project includes several components: 1) write-ups of the objective, project plan, survey approach (due dates indicated below); 2) a sophisticated group presentation that will be graded both on thoroughness of information presented as well as innovation and quality in presentation style (e.g., use of multimedia); 3) An 8-10 pages write-up of the final project and your findings. You’ll receive a single group grade for the data collection, analysis and presentation. (You’ll also have an opportunity to evaluate your group members—I expect each group member to make a strong contribution.) You will also receive an individual grade for your contributions to the group and your final paper.

**Course Ground Rules**

• This syllabus is subject to change and adjustment throughout the semester in order to accommodate timely, late-breaking topics and events, the unique needs of each student and groups of students, etc. Students having any doubt or questions regarding assignments, schedules, etc. should immediately check with their fellow students and/or the professor.

• You are expected to be well prepared for each class meeting, provide value to the class discussion, and remain courteous and sensitive to the interests of others.

**IV. Grading**

**a. Breakdown of Grade**

| Assignment | % of Grade |
| --- | --- |
| Class Attendance and participation\* | 10 |
| Homework assignments | 30 |
| Midterm | 15 |
| Group Research and presentation | 20\*\* |
| Final paper | 25 |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** |

\*Class Participation includes in-class projects and quizzes.

\*\*15% will be based on the professor’s assessment of the group and individual, and 5% will be on the individual peer evaluations prepared by participants in each group. Put another way, an individual student may have their group research grade adjusted up or down based on their individual contribution to the group based on the evaluations of their peers in the group.

**b. Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 95% to 100%: A | 80% to 83%: B- | 67% to 69%: D+ |
| 90% to 94%: A- | 77% to 79%: C+ | 64% to 66%: D |
| 87% to 89%: B+ | 74% to 76%: C | 60% to 63%: D- |
| 84% to 86%: B | 70% to 73%: C- | 0% to 59%: F |

**c. Grading Standards**

**“A” Papers/Projects** have writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. Paper/project has excellent organization and flow; original thinking. Reflects a thorough understanding of the subject matter as demonstrated by a clear explanation of the subject matter (more than rehashing what is in the course reading), and the ability to apply the subject matter to a hypothetical or fact situation. Also, the paper/project includes one or more references to secondary material outside the course reading.

**“B” Papers/Projects** have two to five spelling or grammar mistakes. Correctly sets forth the subject matter and applies correctly to the “asks”/props of the paper or project. Includes some creativity.  
  
**“C” Papers/Projects** have more than five errors (spelling or grammar). Poorly edited and/or proofread. Passive rather than active verbs become the norm. Little or no creativity shown. Includes one or more substantive mistakes in stating or applying the subject matter.  
  
“**D” Papers/Projects** have more than 10 errors (spelling, grammar). Missed some of the “asks”/props of the assignment – incomplete (i.e. assignment calls for 3 cites to reading and less than that or none are included; assignment includes two different hypothetical fact scenarios, and only one is analyzed; assignment asks for legal test to be applied, and the wrong test if set forth and applied). Needs to work with writing coach.  
  
**“F” Papers/Projects** are late (without express permission from instructor in advance) or not turned in.

**V. Assignment Submission Policy**

Late papers and assignments are not accepted without prior written consent of the professor, and, then, they are only received by the new due date with 5 points minimum deducted from what the number grade would have been if turned in on time.

Assignments must be submitted via email to the instructor by the beginning of class on their due date. It is preferred that assignments be sent by email to Professor Sherman.

**VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

Required Text: Bora Pajo, *Introduction to Research Methods, A Hands-On Approach”*. This text is available at the USC Bookstore and also through Amazon.

**VII. Laptop Policy**

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [**Annenberg Virtual Commons**](http://vc.uscannenberg.org/) for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s [Information Technology Services](http://itservices.usc.edu/wireless/support/) website.

**VIII. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown  
*Important note to students:*** *Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.*

*Assignments below show what you need to have done in advance to be ready for that class.*

**Session 1 – August 21:** The Necessity for Research, Introductions, overview of course, readings and syllabus. Introduction to research tools and ethics. Preview of final project.

Assignments (what you need to have done before this class on August 21):

¬ Course text, Chapter 1

¬ Bring to class an article discussing some person; company; brand; issue that you believe could benefit from a PR campaign that is developed from the research and analysis that we will be studying throughout this class. To give you an idea of what I have in mind: Wells Fargo, Chipotle, Marchesa clothing, Google, NFL; addressing the opioid addiction crisis; Facebook, Kanye West, Taylor Swift. Pick something you are interested in because it may end up being the “client” for either your group project or your individual client. If you are interested in a particular industry, this is a great opportunity to learn more about that industry by choosing a client in it.

**Session 2 – August 28:** PR and business outcomes; setting objectives; achieving measurable goals. This session will discuss the strategies and procedure for conducting even the most elementary original research project. We’ll discuss how you determine what you’re looking for and what your objectives should be. We’ll review Situation and SWOT analyses; talk about goals vs. objectives.

Formation of groups/client and topic selection for final project. Your group will select your “client” and the nature of your research. If you miss this class session, you will be automatically assigned to a group.

Assignments:

¬ Course text, Chapter 2

¬ Setting Goals and Objectives, http://www.cuttingedgepr.com/articles/prplans\_set\_goals.asp

¬ “Objectives” assignment for the final project groups will prepared in class and due by the end of class.

**Session 3 – September 4**: Where it all begins - Secondary research; research training. During this class session, we will examine various ways to conduct secondary research. Bring your laptop. We will examine effective – and not so effective – methods for creating insights from a variety of sources. Our goal is to start producing insights about your client.

Assignments:

¬ Course text, Chapter 3 (only pages 53 – 61); Chapter 8

¬ https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2006\_Planning\_Eval.pdf

¬ <http://libguides.usc.edu/publicrelations> - be prepared to discuss at least two of the resources on this site (USC Research Guides/Public Relations and how you may be able to use them to advance the objectives in your “Objectives” assignment due in Session 2

¬ Description of project plan and final objectives (in class project, due at the end of class)

¬ “Situation Analysis” assignment (in class project, due at the end of class)

**Session 4 – September 11**: Qualitative research: Focus groups and interviews - qualitative approaches to public relations research using focus groups and interviews.

Assignments:

--Written assignment: The name or initiative that will be your individual client, and your situation analysis for them which will include your objective and a measurable goal (email to Prof. Sherman before the beginning of class)

¬ Sign up for a Qualtrics account through USC (free for USC students)

-- Course text, Chapter 11

-- Read, Krueger and Casey, Focus Group Interviewing, <https://richardakrueger.com/focus-group-interviewing/>

-- Read “An Exploration of Focus Group Methodology”, <http://future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Future-iQ-Partners-Focus-Groups-Tech-Aims-Analysis-FINAL.pdf>

**Session 5 – September 18:** Focus on social media; introducing content analysis – Whether you’re a rich researcher or a poor one, there are all sorts of online tools available to help you map and monitor your publics. But what do you do with all those data? There will be time for the final project groups to discuss and report to the class on what data and analytical information they can be extracting from social media concerning their client.

Assignments:

¬ Read “The Power of Like 2 – How Social Marketing Works”, on Blackboard under Professor supplied content

¬ Read Paine, How to Measure Social Media Relations, on Blackboard under Professor supplied content

¬ Read, Social Media Monitoring Tools for PR, Marketing & Competitive Analysis, <https://buildfire.com/social-media-monitoring-tools/>

¬ SOCIAL MEDIA ASSIGNMENT DUE BEFORE CLASS ON OCTOBER 2:

* For the company/brand/initiative that you have picked for yourself to work on this semester:
  + Perform a content analysis of what you have found on social media/blogs concerning your client. (See slide 5 of Session 5 class power point for what this means discussing – i.e. depth, dominance, subject, tonality, positioning, spokesperson)
  + Discuss at least one outside service (i.e. blog ranking service) that you used to research what was being said about your client and other information used in your content analysis) and what you like and didn’t like so much about the service you picked
  + Describe 3 takeaways from your social media content analysis that you would frame as PR recommendations to your client with sufficient detail so that your client will understand reasoning (and research support) for your recommendations.

**Session 6 – September 25**: Quantitative Research – Using data for decision-making; surveys. An overview of digital analytics and using data for decision-making. We’ll also talk about one of the biggest tools in the researcher’s arsenal: the survey. Class time will focus on how to write great questions with the focus on the “client” for your final project group.

Assignments:

¬ Course text, Chap. 4 (pages 88 – 93); Chap. 5

¬ Read Phillips, M.R., & Paine, K.D. “Doing measurement right: One organization’s experience creating a best in class measurement program from scratch,” <http://painepublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/DoingMeasuremtRight.pdf>

¬ Review “Survey” assignment and come to class with any questions you have about the assignment (posted on Blackboard under “Assignments”– due in five weeks – October 30)

¬ Group project plans and final objectives due today

**Session 7 – October 2:** Sampling: Who do we want to hear from? How do you decide whom to interview? Who to survey? How about which Twitter updates to analyze? Today we’ll talk about sampling decisions and why they matter for research.

Assignments:

¬ Course text, Chap. 6

¬ During class, break into final project groups and develop a sampling plan (due at the end of class). The sampling plan will be of assistance when finding volunteers to participate in the focus group(s) that you will be conducting for your group client.

¬ “Social Media” assignment due today (see September 18th discussion of assignment)

**Session 8 – October 9**: Project updates. Time will be given to work on projects as a group, and also get further guidance from the professor.

Assignment:

¬ Bring 10 hard copies of your survey assignment questions to class so you can pretest them with members of your group. This is your chance to get feedback from your colleagues and refine them as needed before getting people to answer the survey for your individual client.

**Session 9 – October 16**: We’ll discuss how to develop deep insights from media coverage of your organization (content analysis) and continue our discussion of social media analysis.

Assignments:

¬ Midterm due today (Assignment posted on Blackboard. Generally speaking, the midterm will consist of a write-up on your individual client and include a discussion of the secondary research you did on your client; a social media analysis of relevant information concerning your client; and a research plan consisting of the quantitative and qualitative research that you recommend the client allow you to conduct with sufficient detail so that your client understands what you are proposing and how it fits with your research objective and measurable goal for your client.

¬ Blackboard reading – TBD

**Session 10 – October 23**: Understanding data. Today we’ll build on what we’ve already learned about interpreting quantitative and qualitative data. We will discuss how to create visual charts to show the results of quantitative research.

Assignments:

¬ Course text, Chapter 10; Chapter 12 (pages 293 – 300)

¬ Read Paine (2008), Using Public Relations Research to Drive Business Results, <http://painepublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/UsingResearch_DriveBusiness2.pdf>

**Session 11 – October 30**: Measuring public relations effectiveness. Proudly displaying a stack of media clips or pointing to an attendance list is no longer considered adequate. During this class session, we will examine the traditional – and not so traditional – ways to show our value. What are our boards/bosses/clients looking for? Can it be measured? What really matters? These and other age-old questions about public relations measurement will be examined.

Assignments:

¬ Read Jeffrey et al., “Exploring the Link between Share of Media Coverage and Business Outcomes,” <http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Media_Coverage_Business06.pdf>

¬ Survey assignment due today

**Session 12 – November 6**: Competitive Analysis This session is an important part of your final project. With whom does an organization compete? Once we determine this, how do we conduct a rigorous competitive analysis without resorting to industrial espionage? We will work on your group’s competitive analysis in class by breaking into final project groups.

Assignments:

¬ Bring your data to class ¬ “Data insights”

¬ Written SWOTs analysis of your final project client (will need to do in advance of working in groups during this class). You will be asked to turn this written analysis in before class by emailing it to your professor.

**Session 13 – November 13:** Data analysis workshop. We’ll work together to analyze your data for your group client, and start making sense of what you’ve discovered. We’ll bring the pieces together and talk about how various research methods work together for use across a program of research, and how programmatic research can drive strategic planning.

Assignments:

¬ Bring your data for analysis.

**SCHOOL BREAK – HAPPY THANKSGIVING! [NO CLASS 11/20]**

**Session 14 – November 27**: Final presentations. Groups will present their final 15-20 minute presentations.

Assignments:

¬ 2-4 pages peer evaluation of the other persons in your group: how well did they work with the group; were they timely in what they needed to be doing for the group; did they contribute ideas and time toward the final project; who stood out as taking on a “project lead” role in the group; and how would you evaluate their piece of the final project.

**STUDY DAYS – December 1 – 4 (NO CLASS 12/4)**

**FINAL EXAM PERIOD – December 11, 7-9 p.m.**

Cumulative Experience

Written portion of final projects due Tuesday, December 11, at 7 p.m. via email to the instructor.

**IX. Policies and Procedures**

**Additional Policies**

**Use of USC emails and Blackboard to Communicate.** Students are expected to check their USC email for updates concerning additional reading, assignments or other communications from your professor. In order to try and be more sustainable, assignments will be posted on Blackboard under “Assignments”.

**Ban on use of internet and social media during class.** Laptops can be used for the following: to take notes during class; review written materials prepared in anticipation of class; present to the class; work on projects with your final project group (when the class is broken into groups), or complete and email pop quizzes and in-class assignments. However, no student shall access the internet or social media using any electronic device including their laptops or smart phones (unless the internet access is specific to what we are working on together in class). Because of the distraction of surfing the internet and looking at social media during class, more universities are starting to ban laptops completely from the classroom. *See, e.g., The Case Against Laptops in the Classroom;* [*http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2015/07/case-against-laptops-in-the-classroom.html*](http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2015/07/case-against-laptops-in-the-classroom.html)*.* A student who is in violation of this ban will have their class participation grade for the class in which she/he is caught using the internet during class lowered by 5-40 points depending on how egregious their use of the internet or social media.

**Internships**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must by unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism class.

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**a. Academic Conduct**

*Plagiarism*

Presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (<http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>).

*USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity*

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

**b. Support Systems**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.* Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

**X. About Your Instructor**

Michelle Sherman has been practicing law for over 25 years in a range of different sectors - the public sector as an assistant public defender; the private (“agency”) sector as a partner in a major law firm; and in the corporate sector as in house counsel for Farmers Group, Inc. where she is currently. Michelle started a social media law blog in 2010, and used social media and traditional marketing tools to grow the blog into having some of the largest readership for the law firm’s blogs. Michelle also leveraged her social media blog into having a monthly column with Cyberspace Lawyer, a Thompson Reuters publication, and has also spoken widely to judges, attorneys and business professional on social media related issues. Michelle has authored a book on the use of social media in litigation and trial, *Winning with Social Media*, that was published in September 2016; and she has been a contributing writer for the *Daily Journal,* a legal newspaper. Michelle also managed the social media presence for an international law firm of over 750 attorneys. Michelle has also served as the lead for a professional networking group at Farmers Insurance, and introduced skills building programs on topics to help people network, and prepare themselves for their next career advancement. Michelle has been an adjunct professor at USC Annenberg since 2012.