

**PR 351A: Strategic Public Relations Media and Content**  
**4 Units**

**Spring 2020 — Mondays — 9 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21153D

**Location:** ANN 413

**Instructor:** Kate Flynn Jacobs

**Office Location:** ANN lobby or classroom

**Office Hours:** Mondays, 12:30-1 p.m. or by appointment

**Contact Info:** [kfj@usc.edu](mailto:kfj@usc.edu), 626-487-2444 (email is best)

**I. Course Description**

Today's public relations professional needs to understand and be competent in many forms of communication. The business world they work in is rapidly evolving with earned, owned and paid media converging. Media relations, social media content creation and influencer engagement, and paid media are now equally important for any organization's strategic communications. The role of the public relations practitioner has changed to reflect this shift and training needs to include intensive writing plus creating high-quality multimedia content for traditional, emerging and social media.

This class is an intensive, hands-on course designed to provide students with the skills necessary to engage with, and produce compelling content for, contemporary media channels of all types.

What defines the media: Who are they? What do they do? How do they get their stories? What tools are needed in today's media environment? How do we best engage media in today's environment of media convergence?

**II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

This class will provide an understanding of how to write and produce content and tools used to engage traditional and emerging media. We will examine the rapidly changing fields of digital media and their roles in the relationship between public relations and the modern media.

In this class, the emphasis will be on writing and actual content production such as short interview videos and photos that tell a story and enhance your overall communications strategy.

The success of the public relations professional has as much to do with writing ability as anything else. The ability to write well, write creatively, to capture the attention of your audience is essential for an exceptional career. Writing skills are the essence of being an excellent content creator.

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

- Identify an array of traditional and emerging print, broadcast and online media outlets and understand their inner workings.
- Craft and pitch a story to any of the aforementioned media, with a keen understanding of what constitutes news for every type of audience.
- Write materials and create content for both media outlets and general audiences.
- Prepare a detailed media relations plan that reflects an understanding of the role of integrated strategy and effective targeting of the audience, message and outlet.

### **III. Course Notes**

#### ***WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:***

1. Class starts at on time. Chronic tardiness will affect your participation grade, as will absences. You don't have to ask me for permission to miss class, leave early or come late. I leave those decisions to you; however, you will lose participation points. There is no make-up for in-class work for missed classes.
2. If you are requesting an excused absence, you must inform me and provide documentation prior to the start of class. Participation points are not awarded for excused absences. You will be expected to make up any missed in-class work.
3. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a fellow student. I do not email notes or handouts.
4. Assignments are due at the time I designate. Assignments not following directions will be graded lower. If you are absent, you are responsible for getting me your homework by the due date/time. No late assignments are accepted.
5. There will be no make-ups for the midterm. There will be no extensions for the final project. You must complete the midterm and final project to pass the class.
6. Class participation is expected and will help your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute. Lack of participation will reduce your participation grade. Hearing from each of you makes for a more enriching class for all of us.
7. No texting or any use of cell phones or other forms of electronic communication during class. Doing so will have a negative impact on your grade. Computers for class work ONLY. Turn off your messaging on your laptop during class. Messaging during class will lower your participation grade.
8. There should only be one discussion going on at a time in class. Paying attention to the speaker, whether it is the instructor, fellow student or guest is a sign of respect and professionalism. Disruptive behavior, such as talking out of turn and carrying on side conversations, will negatively impact your grade.
9. The syllabus is our guideline and will change during the course of the semester to accommodate current events and speaker schedules.
10. You are expected to check BlackBoard every week for updates on homework and assignments. I will post the week's homework within 24 hours of our last class. You are also responsible for checking your USC email account, which is how I will communicate with you. The homework schedule will be reflected on BlackBoard.

#### ***WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:***

1. I am open to your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues concerning you. Please don't hesitate to talk to me, email me or call me. Never hesitate to reach out.
2. I am fair. When you get an assignment back from me, you should have a good idea why you earned the grade you did and what can be done to improve your writing. However, if things are not clear, let's talk. The more discussion, the better the understanding.
3. This syllabus is a general guideline for what we will cover during the semester. There will be in-class writing homework and other assignments. Feel free to suggest topics that are of interest to you and I will do my best to incorporate those ideas into assignments so that we can broaden our horizons into more diverse storytelling.
4. I'll guide you along to improve your writing, but feel free to help guide our discussions. Bring to class your questions, observations and opinions about how you see the role of public relations at work in the real world. Our most pertinent and interesting class time will come from what's happening in our world today.
5. I am available for questions and conversations before and after class and by appointment. Ready access is through email. I will respond to all messages within 24 hours, unless my message service indicates otherwise.

#### IV. Description of Assignments

- In-class assignments/homework
- Take-home writing assignments
- Midterm Examination
- Final project: online newsroom
- Participation

#### V. Grading

##### a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Participation	10%
In-class Assignments/Homework	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Writing assignments	25%
Final Project	35%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

##### 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

<b>A Range:</b>	Writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. All required elements included (solid headline and lead, varied vocabulary; supporting facts/figures; quotes as required). Excellent organization and flow; original thinking. Showed creativity in packaging/distribution method. High end of scale: publishable today as is. You will not get in the A range if you have any misspelled words.
<b>B Range:</b>	Two-five spelling, grammar or AP Style mistakes. One or more required elements missing or poorly displayed (i.e., boring headline; confusing lead, etc.). Shows potential as a good writer. Adhered to inverted pyramid. High end of scale will have at least one extraordinary element such as astonishing lead or little-known facts or pithy quote. Some creativity shown. Publishable with medium editing.
<b>C Range:</b>	More than five errors (spelling, grammar, AP style). Poorly edited and/or proofread. May have adhered to inverted pyramid but strayed at beginning or end. Hackneyed elements such as trite headline or uninteresting lead. Little or no facts/figures included. Passive rather than active verbs become the norm. Little or no creativity. Publishable with major editing.
<b>D Range</b>	More than 10 errors (spelling, grammar). Needs to be completely rewritten. Poorly organized with little or no understanding of journalistic style/standards. Needs to work with writing coach.
<b>Failing:</b>	Not rewritable or no assignment turned in.

## V. Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due on the dates specified. Without prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will not be accepted.

## VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. You must bring your laptop to every class. I advise you to bring a charger as well. If you cannot complete the in-class assignments, you will receive no credit.
2. *"The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law."* Associated Press, 2019
3. Dictionaries and other writing references are indispensable. You need to have easy access to one or more guides to spelling, grammar, punctuation and writing style.

Please bring these to class each week, as you will need them for in-class writing exercises. As needed, additional reading assignments will be given during the semester.

Make a news outlet your opening home page. Be familiar with a wide array of news media and be up on current events.

## 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](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

## VIII. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/13/20 – 5/1/20)

**Friday, January 31:** Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

**Friday, January 31:** Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

**Tuesday, February 4:** Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

**Friday, February 28:** Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

**Friday, February 28:** Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

**Friday, April 3:** Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

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## IX. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

### January 13 /WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION. A LOOK AT MEDIA CHANNELS and PACKAGING OF MATERIALS

- Housekeeping: Presentation of syllabus. Going over class requirements and outlining of what to expect over the course of the semester.
- Down to business: Beginning to define who are the media and what do they need or want with the public relations professional.
- Review of written media collateral.

#### ***In class:***

- Review news releases and fact sheets
- Write news release.

#### **Homework:**

- Find two news articles: one you think is well-written, one you think is poorly written. Upload a typed report telling me why you think one is good and one is bad, and what first caught your attention to each story; includes links to stories.
- Fact Sheet

## **January 20/WEEK 2: No Class – Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

### **January 27/WEEK 3: MEDIA COLLATERAL – THE NEWS RELEASE AND BEYOND**

- Discussion of the fundamentals of good writing and how to fine-tune your press release; paying attention to details.
- Packaging of materials: First the news release and then what? Bios and Advisories
- Look at online newsrooms and the bios they publish.

***In class:*** Advisory

#### **Homework:**

- Create a list of materials beyond the release, fact sheet and advisory you would create in order to enhance your news release story.
- Bio

### **February 3/WEEK 4: ONLINE STORYTELLING**

- We'll examine myriad ways to enhance your story: blogs, features, op-eds. What are the differences, what are they used for, and when to use them.
- Creating materials for a variety of platforms: print, web, social media.

***In Class:***

- Features worksheet.
- Write a feature.

**Homework:** Finish your feature.

### **February 10/WEEK 5: MULTIMEDIA CONTENT AS A PR TOOL**

- The news release has evolved from the traditional written media relations tool to a complex multi-media advocacy tool to promote an individual, company, non-profit or government's position.

***In class:***

- Backgrounders.
- Review online newsrooms.

**Homework:** Write a backgrounder.

## **February 17/WEEK 6: No Class – Presidents' Day**

### **February 24/WEEK 7: DEVELOPMENT OF A PRESS/INFORMATION KIT – HOW DO WE DELIVER INFORMATION FOR MEDIA TO REPORT?**

- While the press release is an important component in your media relations toolbox, equally important are the ancillary materials that reporters use. To be viewed as a valued resource, you must also know how to prepare other materials to tell your story: Feature stories, backgrounders, bios – other ways to hook the media.

***In class:*** Op-Ed

**Homework:** Midterm next week. Bring laptops and chargers.

### **March 2/WEEK 8: MIDTERM**

- In-class writing exam: Writing of elements covered in class to date.

**Homework:** Upload a photo that ran on an online news site, newspaper or magazine that you think was PR provided. Type up a brief explanation of why you did or did not like it or think it was effective.

### **March 9/WEEK 9: ONLINE NEWSROOMS/ STORYTELLING WITH VISUALS**

- What do they look like; what's in them; who uses them and why?
- How to create a digital press kit and develop an effective online newsroom.
- Fundamentals of WordPress: Creating posts and pages, inserting multimedia, using links, theme design, creating menus and sub-menus.
- Review photos
- The art of media image storytelling, writing compelling titles and photo captions.

#### ***In class:***

- Create personal websites
- Take an effective photo, edit it, and write a caption and post to blog.

**Homework:** Create separate pages to post bio, news release, fact sheet, advisory, photos

### **March 16: No Class – Spring Break**

### **March 23/WEEK 10: CREATION OF B-ROLL VIDEO**

- A summary of video production techniques using modern HD video cameras including mobile phones, SLRs, etc.
- An overview of editing techniques for non-professional editing programs such as iMovie.
- What makes effective video?

***In class:*** Creation of b-roll

**Homework:** Polish b-roll and post to WordPress.

### **March 30/WEEK 11: ADVANCED VIDEO**

- Beyond b-roll: interviews.

***In class:*** Interview a classmate and gather b-roll.

**Homework:** Create video package of classmate interview. Post to WordPress.

### **April 6/WEEK 12: PITCHING THE MEDIA & INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES**

- How and when to talk to the media; what media to target; how to get your story delivered.
- How to prepare for an interview. How to develop key messages. How to weave main points into responses. How to deal with the tough questions.

#### ***In Class:***

- Write an email pitch.

#### **Homework:**

- Finish email pitch
- Leave a voicemail pitch.
- **Work on final projects**

### **April 13:/WEEK 14 PRESENTATION SKILLS**

- Media Events: press conferences, parties, press events. When to use them, when to avoid them and how to throw them.
- What works and, almost as importantly, what doesn't. Giving the media materials flexibility to meet the needs of different audiences.
- The relationship between the public relations and the media. Tools for working with the media.
- How to talk to the media; when to talk to the media; what media to target; how to get your story delivered.
- Making sure your pitch isn't the tree that falls in the forest when no one is in the forest.

***In class:*** Presentation training

**Homework:** Finalize final projects

#### **April 20/WEEK 14: INTEGRATING MEDIA COMPONENTS INTO A ROBUST CROSS-PLATFORM CAMPAIGN**

- You've developed all your media materials and had your media event, now let's amplify, aggregate and curate across our social and owned media channels.

**Homework: Complete work on final project.**

#### **April 27/WEEK 15: FINAL PROJECTS**

Final project presentations

#### **Friday, May 8, 8 a.m.-10 a.m./FINAL EXAM PERIOD**

Final summative semester review

### **X. Policies and Procedures**

#### **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 in to the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations 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 Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

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

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*

[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.



USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call  
[dps.usc.edu](https://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

#### *Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>


The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

#### *Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]*

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

### **XI. About Your Instructor**

Kate Flynn Jacobs is a communications consultant specializing in strategic planning, writing communications and media training. Her more than 30 years of experience includes media relations, speechwriting, communications planning, crisis communications, annual report writing, and corporate newspaper editing. She has won awards from the Public Relations Society of American and the International Association of Business Communicators. For 20 years, she has taught at USC’s Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, focusing on undergraduate and graduate Public Relations theory and writing courses. She has a master’s in Communication Management from the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. Fíric spraoi (“fun fact” in Irish): She has dual Irish/American citizenship. 

## FINAL PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS

Create an online newsroom. You will come up with a topic, fact or fiction. You will include any or all of the aspects of media collateral we will cover in class, or any other material you consider relevant. Material to consider (**items in bold are required**), but not limited to:

- **News releases: at least one must be included**
- **Video: Required** (Only include video that you create. It does not have to be perfect. I am looking for effort, not expertise.) Video should be no less than 1 minute.
- **Fact sheets: at least one is required**
- Bios/Profiles
- Backgrounders
- Feature stories
- Advisories
- Pitch letters
- Artwork (original creation encouraged)
- Photos/Graphics: **At least three photos and/or graphic design elements must be your own creation.**
- Logos (You may use an existing logo, but I strongly encourage an effort on your creating a new look.)
- **Embed .pdf versions of your written media at the bottom of each page.** This includes releases, fact sheets, advisories, pitch letters.

Expand your content creation to include creative and unique ways to tell your story. It doesn't have to fit the defined pieces listed above. The most successful content is based on creativity and variety.

Be sure that your project has depth. This is your chance to show me that you've learned and understood the elements to public relations writing. Don't be superficial and don't be short on your use of collateral material. Make sure your copy is clean. You lose points for sloppy copy. There will be no way you can get an A on this project if you turn in a project that includes spelling, grammar and style errors.

### GRADING ELEMENTS:

- Overall design of site: Clean and creative.
- Solid content: create enough pieces to illuminate your topic. Show that you can create content with substance and depth.
- Variety: Don't create all your pieces around just one hook. Show that you can create an array of materials with different storytelling elements. Mix it up with newsworthy, human interest, creative and varied storytelling.
- Quality of writing: pay attention to style, grammar, spelling and formatting. If you have sloppy copy, your grade will be lower.
- Emphasis on creating visually interesting pages. Unlike your 209 project, which focused on written collateral, this project is meant to combine the importance of writing with the importance of multimedia. As an online newsroom, look to make each page more than just text: include photos, graphics and other visual elements to make the pages interesting. Not every page has to have visuals, but you should be considering how to make the majority of your pages a mix of written content and some form or forms of multimedia.

### REQUIREMENTS:

- News Release: keep in mind who the audience is and what outlet you see your news release running.
- Video of at least a minute in length. One video must be 100 percent your creation. Video, photos and graphics must be yours. I am not looking for video perfection; I am looking for the strategy behind the story you are telling.
- Navigation bar with at least one pull-down menu.
- Inclusion of photos and graphics. Aside from the video, you may use photos/graphics and logos from other sources. Where you can, add a photo/video credit directly on the page. Do not have every photo and graphic come from another source. Some visual creation must be your own. At least three photos must be your own.
- Embedded pdf versions for standard media relations material (release, fact sheet, advisory, pitch letters).
- Email me with a detailed list of what photos/graphics/videos/logos etc. are entirely your creation and what are taken from outside sources.

**SUGGESTION:** Create your own idea. Make your own plan to introduce a new restaurant, or launch a new product, or promote a band, for example. In my experience, the more you create your own idea, the stronger your materials. If you are going to choose an already existing topic, I urge you to not rely on materials that have already been created. It's too easy to use turns of phrases, collateral ideas and physical designs that you see in someone else's work. The more you apply your own creativity, the better the product.

**All written materials in your project must be written by you. DO NOT include written materials produced, written or created by anyone else. If there is even one sentence taken from another source, you will receive a failing grade.**

**Due at 9 a.m. April 27.**