



**PR 428: Social, Legal and Ethical
Foundations of Public Relations
4 Units**

Spring 2021 – Thursdays – 2-5:20 p.m.

Section: 21257D

Location: Online

Instructor: Susan Gavigan

Office: Online

Office Hours: Available by appointment

Contact Info: sgavigan@usc.edu

I. Course Description

As the field of Strategic Public Relations continues to grow in size, complexity, and the ability to interact directly and on a two-way basis without mass media intermediaries, practitioners must be increasingly cognizant of their responsibilities to society at large, the legal and regulatory environment in which they function, and the ethical standards and decision-making processes on which they must rely. PR 428 provides an applied, working understanding of those interconnecting concepts and responsibilities, with an emphasis on personal decision making.

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

This course explores principles and concepts of legal, ethical and social issues that a PR professional may encounter during his or her career. Through reading and written assignments, in-class exercises and discussion, lectures, supplemental learning through readings/multimedia materials, reflective learning activities and group presentations, this course is intended to:

- Increase students' awareness of fundamental U.S. legal concepts in media and communications
- Enable students to develop an understanding of principles of moral reasoning and ethical problem solving/decision-making
- Offer experiential and reflective opportunities for students to explore their personal values and ethical perspectives
- Examine concepts related to social responsibility programs, and provide an opportunity to develop social media/marketing recommendations

III. Description of Assignments

- **Presentation of Case Study/ Article (20%):** Bring and present one case study/article to class pertaining to recent/current "real life" events or issues involving ethical, legal or social aspects of public relations. Prepare a power point presentation with a detailed description and a list of three questions to engage the classroom in conversation. You will be in charge of the discussion and calling on your fellow students. Dates will be assigned by the professor. If you have a conflict, you can switch with a classmate. Both of you will need to advise the professor of the change. **You must email the professor with your topic choice no later than one week prior to your presentation.**
 - Example: GM launches large scale recall of its cars due to defective ignition switch
 - What should be said and done going forward? What PR mistakes did GM make or not make in handling the crisis?
- **Ethics Food For Thought Briefs (10%):** 1-2 page written analyses of, and recommendations pertaining to, recent/current "real life" events or issues involving ethical, legal or social aspects of public relations. Details will be discussed in class.

- Journal Summaries (10%): The study of ethics and comprehension of our own standards for moral behavior can be enhanced through self-reflection; ergo, you will be asked to regularly record your thoughts and feelings associated with select assignments (based on either your own personal/professional experience or that of others), and submit brief summaries. Guidelines for Journal Summaries will be provided in class.
- Midterm Paper (20%): Students will be assigned a topic and will be asked to write a long-form blog article of 500-750 words, demonstrating critical thinking and applying concepts learned in class by analyzing an ethical and/or legal challenges faced by an organization. Additional details will be discussed in class.
- Final Group Paper and Presentation (30%): Working in small groups, you will research, write and deliver a presentation in which you demonstrate critical thinking and apply concepts you have learned in class, by analyzing hypothetical situation in which an organization faced legal, ethical and social challenges having reputational implications. Additional details will be discussed in class. See below for grading rubric.
- Class Discussion/Participation (10%): 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 you will come to class having read the assignment(s) and prepared to join class in discussions, contributing questions and comments about the materials. Classes begin promptly, so please arrive on time. If you are unable to attend a class for some reason, please notify me as soon as possible and assume personal responsibility for gathering notes from other classmates.

PR 428 - Participation in Class Discussion Grading			
CRITERION	EXEMPLARY 13-15 pts	SATISFACTORY 9-12 pts	UNACCEPTABLE 0-8 pts
Frequency	Frequent contribution to class discussion.	Regular contribution to class discussion.	Seldom or no contribution to class discussion.
Relevance	Contributions to class directly address key issues, questions, or problems related to the text and the discussion activity.	Contributions to class address key issues, questions, or problems related to the text and the discussion activity, but in some cases only.	Contributions to class do not directly address the question or problem posed by the discussion activities.
Insight	Contributions to class offer original or thoughtful insights, analyses, or observations that demonstrate a strong grasp of concepts and ideas pertaining to the discussion topics.	Contributions to class offer some insight, analysis, or observation to the topic but may not demonstrate a full understanding or knowledge of concepts and ideas pertaining to the discussion topics.	Contributions to class do not offer any significant insight, analysis, or observation related to the topic. No knowledge or understanding is demonstrated regarding concepts and ideas pertaining to the discussion topics.
Support	Contributions to class support all claims and opinions with either rational argument or evidence.	Contributions to class generally support claims and opinions with evidence or argument, but may leave some gaps where unsupported opinions still appear.	Contributions to class do not support their claims with either evidence or argument. The contributions contain largely unsupported opinion.
PR 428 Final Presentation – Evaluation Rubric			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group produces sound, thought-provoking recommendations that are likely to appeal to target publics. • Thoroughly examines all pertinent aspects of the organization per the instructions, and delivers a clear, compelling strategy. • Effectively delivers engaging, informative multimedia presentation. • All team members demonstrate familiarity with content and present competently. • Content is optimally structured and organized. • Delivers professional quality materials, free of grammatical errors, typos, etc. • Accurately cites all source material in accordance with APA style standards. • Meets all posted deadlines for project deliverables. 	<p>Exemplary 17-20 pts</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group produces sound albeit somewhat boilerplate recommendations lacking in innovation, creativity, strategic thinking, making it less likely to appeal to target publics. • Examines most pertinent aspects of a given organization per the instructions • Delivers informative but not very engaging multimedia presentation. • Some but not all team members demonstrate familiarity with content and present competently. • Content is effectively structured and organized. • Delivers reasonable quality materials with a total of 1-3 grammatical errors, typos, formatting errors, etc. • Accurately cites all source material in accordance with APA style standards. • Meets all posted deadlines for project deliverables. 	<p>Satisfactory 13-16 pts</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group produces incomplete, less-than-sophisticated and/or “boilerplate” recommendations. • Examines some pertinent aspects of a given organization but fails to identify a singular, clear strategy. • Delivers poor quality materials with 4+ grammatical errors, typos, formatting errors, etc. • One team member dominates; other team members demonstrate less familiarity with content and/or do not present competently. 	<p>Unacceptable 0-12 pts</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials lack the professional quality and standards expected of today's PR professionals. Misses posted deadlines for project deliverables. 	
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At the end of the semester, points will be allocated base upon:

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

IV. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Case Study Presentation- grade includes not only your actual presentation, but participation in classmates' presentations.	70	20%
Ethics Food for Thought Briefs (2)	40	10%
Journal Summaries (2)	40	10%
Midterm Paper	70	20%
Final Group Presentation/Paper	140	30%
Class Discussion/Participation	40	10%
TOTAL	400	100%

b. Grading Scale

The Grading Scale for this class is based on the following percentages:

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" projects have writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. All required elements included (catchy headline, solid 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.

"B" projects have two to 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.

"C" projects have 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 shown. Publishable with major editing.

"D" projects have 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.

"F" projects are not rewritable, late or not turned in.

V. Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due on the dates specified unless otherwise stated. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.

- A. **Unless otherwise specified, all assignments must be submitted directly to the instructor in class on the due date.**
- B. All assignments will be discussed in class, and written instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

- Fitzpatrick, Kathy and Bronstein, Carolyn (ed.) (2006). **Ethics in Public Relations – Responsible Advocacy**. Thousand Oaks, CA. SAGE Publications. ISBN: 1-4129-1798-0
- Additional content from handouts, multimedia/websites and other sources to be provided in class and/or found on Blackboard.

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: 1/15/2021 – 4/30/2021; Final Exam Period: 5/5-12/2021)

Friday, February 5: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, February 5: 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 9: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, March 5: 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 9: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

IX. 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.

NOTE- THERE IS NO CLASS APRIL 22, 2021 AS THIS IS THE LAST WELLNESS DAY

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 1/21	Course Overview, Expectations and Introductions	Fitzpatrick & Bronstein (F&B) – Introduction and Ch. 1	
Week 2 1/28	Industry Codes of Ethics and Working with Activist Publics	F&B Ch. 4, Supplemental Reading(s)	
Week 3 2/4	Truth, Transparency and Strategic Risk Communication	F&B Chs. 6 and 8 Supplemental Reading(s)	Journal #1 Due
Week 4 2/11	Cultural Considerations in Ethics	Podcast: Episode 648 of This American Life “Unteachable Moment”	
Week 5 2/18	Responsible Online Communication and Influencers	F&B Ch. 7 Supplemental Reading(s)	
Week 6 2/25	Ethics of Public Diplomacy	F&B Ch. 9	FFT #1 Due
Week 7 3/4	Responsible Advocacy for Non-Profits	Supplemental Reading(s)	
Week 8 3/11	The First Amendment: What is Protected?	Supplemental Reading(s)	Midterm Paper Due
Week 9 3/18	Defamation, Product Disparagement and Privileges	Supplemental Reading(s)	
Week 10 3/25	Commercial Appropriation, Rights of Publicity & False Light		FFT #2 Due
Week 11 4/1	Endorsements, Misrepresentation & CA Bus. & Prof. 17200	Supplemental Reading(s)	
Week 12 4/8	Trademark and Copyright	Supplemental Reading(s)	Journal #2 due
Week 13 4/15	Conflicts of Interest and Whistleblowing; Review and Final Preparation	Supplemental Reading(s)	

Week 14 4/22	No Class: Wellness Day		
Week 15 4/29	Final Presentations		USC Course Evaluations
FINAL PAPER 5/6, 2-4 p.m.	Final Presentations Final Paper Due by 2 p.m.		

X. Policies and Procedures

i. Research, Attribution and Citation

Students may be asked to prepare materials on topics with which they have little knowledge. Many online resources are available to provide assistance, and thorough secondary research is encouraged. Please note, however, that the largely subjective nature of “wiki’s” makes them unacceptable primary sources for this course. Additionally, all public relations writers must learn to create original work, and inappropriate use of existing resources/materials – including failure to provide proper citation and attribution, verbatim usage of other materials, presenting existing material as one’s original work, lack of proper citation, and/or similar practices – may be construed as an act of plagiarism, and subject to the university’s disciplinary policy on acts of academic dishonesty (see below).

ii. Confidentiality

In this class, case studies and projects of a sensitive nature are likely to be discussed; unless already public, the information is considered confidential and should not be shared outside of the classroom without the explicit consent of the person(s) involved.

iii. 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 be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” 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, 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

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.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

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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

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

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

uscsa.usc.edu

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

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, 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

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

Susan P. Gavigan has been an attorney since 1990 and has handled hundreds of contested and uncontested cases, prepared and argued motions on a variety of family and criminal law issues and has represented many clients in protracted litigation. She has written appellate briefs and has argued before the California Court of Appeals. She has served as judge pro temp as needed in the Family law Court.

She has prepared and delivered many lectures regarding a variety of legal issues and has served as a panelist at various student law events. She has developed curriculum for and has taught business law. She currently teaches Media Law and Ethics, Seminar in Mass Communication Law, and Social, Legal and Ethical Foundations of Public Relations at the University of Southern California. She holds a B.A. in Journalism from San Diego State University and a Juris Doctorate from Western State University College of Law.