



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

**Fall 2021 – Tuesdays – 2-5:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21240D

**Location:** ANN 405

**Instructor:** Susan Gavigan

**Office:** ANN Lobby or Classroom

**Office Hours:** Available by appointment

**Contact Info:** [sgavigan@usc.edu](mailto: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:

- Help students understand 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 News Articles to Class (20%): Bring and present one article to class pertaining to recent/current “real life” events or issues involving ethical, legal or social aspects of public relations. Prepare a list of three questions to engage the classroom in conversation. **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 able to choose from several different topics, 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 (20%): 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 ethical challenges having reputational implications. Additional details will be discussed in class.
- 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.
- In-class commentary (10%): After our lectures, a real life hypothetical will be assigned to small groups to present the following week. Points will not only be earned for the presentation of the assignment, but the involvement of the students when fellow classmates are presenting.

At the end of the semester, points will be allocated based upon:

§ Consistent demonstrating that students 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); and

§ Mature classroom behavior that supports learning.

## IV. Grading

### a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Article Presentation	25	25%
Ethics Food for Thought Briefs (2)	10	10%
Journal Summaries (2)	10	10%
Midterm Paper	25	25%
Final Group Presentation/Paper	20	20%
Class Discussion/Participation	10	10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 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
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### 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: 8/23/21 – 12/3/21)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20213/calendar/>

**Friday, September 10:** Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

**Friday, September 10:** Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

**Friday, September 10:** Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

**Tuesday, September 14:** Last day to add or drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

**Friday, October 8:** 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, October 8:** 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, November 12:** 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.*

	<b>Topics/Daily Activities</b>	<b>Readings and Homework</b>	<b>Deliverable/Due Dates</b>
<b>Week 1</b> <b>8/24</b>	Course Overview, Expectations and Introductions	Fitzpatrick & Bronstein (F&B) – Introduction and Ch. 1	
<b>Week 2</b> <b>8/31</b>	Industry Codes of Ethics and Working with Activist Publics	F&B Ch. 4, Supplemental Reading(s)	Journal #1 Due
<b>Week 3</b> <b>9/7</b>	Truth, Transparency and Strategic Risk Communication	F&B Chs. 6 and 8 Supplemental Reading(s)	
<b>Week 4</b> <b>9/14</b>	Cultural Considerations in Ethics	Podcast: Episode 648 of This American Life “Unteachable Moment”	Journal #2 Due
<b>Week 5</b> <b>9/21</b>	Responsible Online Communication and Influencers	F&B Ch. 7 Supplemental Reading(s)	
<b>Week 6</b> <b>9/28</b>	Ethics of Public Diplomacy	F&B Ch. 9	FFT #1 Due
<b>Week 7</b> <b>10/5</b>	First Amendment: What is Protected?	Supplemental Reading(s)	
<b>Week 8</b> <b>10/12</b>	First Amendment cont’d	Supplemental Reading(s)	<b>Midterm Paper Due</b>
<b>Week 9</b> <b>10/19</b>	Defamation, Product Disparagement and Privileges	Supplemental Reading(s)	
<b>Week 10</b> <b>10/26</b>	Endorsements, Misrepresentation & CA Bus. & Prof. 17200		FFT#2 due
<b>Week 11</b> <b>11/2</b>	Commercial Appropriation, Rights of Publicity & False Light		
<b>Week 12</b> <b>11/9</b>	Trademark and Copyright	Supplemental Reading(s)	
<b>Week 13</b> <b>11/16</b>	The four types of Privacy actions	Supplemental Reading(s)	

<b>Week 14</b> <b>11/23</b>	Final Presentations		
<b>Week 15</b> <b>11/30</b>	Final Presentations		USC course evaluations
<b>FINAL EXAM PERIOD</b> <b>12/9, 2-4 p.m.</b>	Summative Experience  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*

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/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

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, 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.

## **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.