



PR 457: The Role of Celebrity in Public Relations

4 Units

Spring 2024 – Wednesdays – 6-9:20 p.m.

Section: 21269R

Location: ANN L115

Instructor: James Ward III

Office: Zoom or ANN Lobby

Office Hours: As mutually agreed upon virtually or up to two hours prior to class for in person

Contact Info: jamesmwa@usc.edu

Course Description:

This course examines the history and application of the celebrity in Public Relations. While the focus will be the entertainment industry, we will also explore politics and other fields (sports, fashion, etc.) looking at both traditional and social media. We will investigate what it means to be a “celebrity” in the 21st century via case studies, news articles and guest speakers.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Deduce where and how celebrity presence enriches a public relations opportunity
- Identify advantageous opportunities as well as issues that may hinder a celebrity
- Evaluate and recommend how brands can strategically elevate their reputation and manage in moments of crisis
- Produce traditional and social media campaigns that partner brands and celebrities

Course Notes:

Copies of lecture slides and other class information will be posted on Blackboard following the class. I strongly encourage you to sign up for entertainment news e-alerts (e.g. The Hollywood Reporter, Deadline, Variety, People, TMZ, Us Weekly, etc.).

Description and Assessment of Assignments:

- News and Case Study of the Week - Class will begin most sessions with a discussion of celebrity activity in the news. Students will present a celebrity case study once during the semester.
- Speaker Questions & Thank You – Prior to each class with a guest speaker - **by Wednesday at midnight (Tuesday at 11:59 p.m.)**, students will submit (in Blackboard) a minimum of **ONE** question to ask the speaker. Subsequently, students will write a thank you note to guests, submitted to Blackboard **by Friday at noon** - including **TWO** things they’ve learned from the guest speaker.
- Writing Assignments - There will be five (5) writing assignments throughout the semester.

- Midterm – Working in assigned teams, students will examine and analyze the rise and, in some cases, fall of highly visible celebrities and icons in various industries (e.g. sports, fashion, politics, TV, film, etc.)
- Final Project – In-depth study of a celebrity - in groups (to be determined), students will act as publicists at an agency and put together a comprehensive public relations plan for an assigned celebrity. (More details to come later in the semester.)
- Reading Material – Instructor will post key articles and other misc. reading materials to Blackboard.
- Class Participation – As public relations/communications is an extremely hands-on field, class participation and active discussion will be a key component of the class and of the final grade.

Grading:

a. Grading Breakdown

Description of assessments and corresponding points and percentage of grade.

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Participation	15	15%
Written Assignments	15	15%
Midterm	20	20%
Case Study	20	20%
Thank You Notes	5	5%
Final Exam	25	25%
TOTAL	100	100%

b. Course Grading Scale

Letter grades and corresponding point value ranges.

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B- (B minus)	67% to 69%: D+ (D plus)
90% to 94%: A- (A minus)	77% to 79%: C+ (C plus)	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+ (B plus)	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D- (D minus)
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C- (C minus)	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

Public Relations

“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 methods. 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 an 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. SEP SEP

“C” projects have more than five errors (spelling, grammar, AP style). Poorly edited and/or proofread. May have adhered to an inverted pyramid but strayed at the 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 a writing coach.

“F” projects are not rewritable, late or not turned in. A grade of “F” also will be assigned for any plagiarized and/or fabricated material that is submitted.

d. Grading Timeline

Every attempt will be made to input grades for assignments within three weeks of the due date.

Assignment Rubrics:

Every attempt will be made to make assignment rubrics clear in description both in class by professor and in Blackboard where assignment will be submitted. If anything is unclear, please email the professor for clarification in advance of assignment due date / deadlines.

Assignment Submission Policy:

- All assignments are due on the dates specified. **If your assignment will be late, please speak with the instructor as soon as anticipated of the late assignment to make arrangements.**
- Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard prior to that day’s class, unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Additional reading to prepare for each session’s discussions or guest speakers will be posted in Blackboard by the Sunday evening preceding the session discussion topic.

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

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

https://catalogue.usc.edu/preview_entity.php?catoid=16&ent_oid=3459

"Since its founding, the 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."

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.

Generative AI Policy:

The USC Annenberg Public Relations and Advertising program views generative AI as an addition to USC's digital literacy tools that students are encouraged to experiment with and use inside and outside the classroom. Students may use generative AI tools such as Chat GPT to help complete their class assignments, but must disclose such use in the bibliography section. Students are solely responsible for the accuracy of their documents, regardless of whether they were completed with the aid of generative AI.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies:

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001:

(15 weeks: 1/8/2024 – 4/26/2024; Final Exam Period: 5/1-8/2024)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20241/calendar/>

Last day to add: Friday, January 26, 2024

Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund: Friday, January 26, 2024

Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, January 26, 2024 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Audit: Tuesday, January 30, 2024

Last day to withdraw without a “W” on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, February 23, 2024 [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 for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, April 5, 2024

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

A weekly schedule of the topics, readings, and deliverables for the course.

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.

Case Study Requirements: Each student will give a slide presentation about their subject (PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi and Google are all acceptable) that includes:

- An overview/history of the celebrity
- Key Findings
- PR implications (e.g. what should a PR practitioner take away from this case?).

Presentation must be five (5) or fewer minutes in length, followed by class Q&A. Longer presentations will result in a deduction of points. Please be succinct.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Date: 1/10	What is “celebrity”? What defines a person(s) as a celebrity? Who defines / deems	News and Cases of the Week.	Please have read prior to class.

	<p>a person(s) as a celebrity? Why do we as the general public care? Should we care? What about a celebrity interests us?</p>	<p>The Cut: "The Promise of Pyer Moss" Read this article and be prepared to discuss in class how celebrity played a role in both the rise and fall of this fashion brand</p>	
<p>Week 2 Date: 1/17</p>	<p>What value do celebrities bring to various industries? What contribution do celebrities make to society and pop culture? When does celebrity help us and when does it fail us? When and how does celebrity help an individual and fail an individual who is the celebrity? (pros and cons) Should we feel sympathy or empathy for celebrities in relation to privacy?</p>	<p>News and Cases of the Week. 10 Worst Things Done by Paparazzi Watch this video ahead of class for background context on this week's discussion. California Law Passes Against Paparazzi Backed by Halle Berry Read this article as added context for class discussion.</p>	<p>Please have watched and read both links prior to class.</p>
<p>Week 3 Date: 1/24</p>	<p>Gaining celebrity status in the film and television industry. The development of talent and celebrity status. What does it mean to become an A-Lister? How does one make the climb? How does the historical SAG strike play a role with AI and celebrity image/likeness? How do you control your own narrative as a celebrity? Can you control your own narrative or does the media have more power? <i>Guest Speaker.</i></p>	<p>News and Cases of the Week. <i>Watch "Pamela, A Love Story" on Netflix.</i> Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.</p>	
<p>Week 4 Date: 1/31</p>	<p>Celebrity: Then vs. Now. Take a deeper examination of celebrity pre-social media juxtaposed to the present day. How has social media helped celebrity? The rise of the social media influencer. What is the difference between a celebrity, influencer and tastemaker? Is there a difference?</p>	<p>News and Cases of the Week Watch "The Real Story of Paris Hilton" Documentary Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.</p>	<p>Please have watched prior to class.</p>

Week 5 Date: 2/7	Celebrity endorsements. Can celebrities really boost sales, donations and brand awareness? How have celebrities used their status to monetize their own brands? Guest Speaker.	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Week 6 Date: 2/14	Celebrities and politics. How do celebrities help shape the political narrative? What does it mean to be a political celebrity?	News and Cases of the Week. ABC News + The View - Kim Kardashian / Prison Reform / Law School Watch embedded interview from "The View" Taylor Swift - GOP Concerns	Please have watched the embedded video and read the article prior to class.
Week 7 Date: 2/21	MIDTERM PRESENTATIONS		
Week 8 Date: 2/28	Royals as Celebrities. We'll dive into the "how and why" of celebrity royal family members.	News and Cases of the Week Watch "Harry and Meghan" on Netflix. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Week 9 Date: 3/6	What does it mean to be a celebrity athlete? How does this hinder or help athletes with their careers after sports? Guest Speaker.	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Spring Break Dates: 3/11-3/15	Spring Recess; No Class Scheduled	Spring Recess; No Class Scheduled	
Week 10 Date: 3/20	Discussion about DEI in the entertainment industry. Press opportunities, red carpets, junkets, media value, etc.	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	

Week 11 Date: 3/27	Pitching Celebrity Clients and Projects (Films, Series, Products, Brands tied to celebrities)	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Week 12 Date: 4/3	Crisis management for celebrities. <i>Guest Speaker.</i>	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Week 13 Date: 4/10	Gaining celebrity status as a child star. Discuss the pros and cons, impact on child stars and their families juxtaposed to the financial success acquired and global fandom.	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Week 14 Date: 4/17	Traditional media disruptors - Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, etc. - how are they using celebrity to create awareness and make way for themselves in the marketplace.	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Week 15 Date: 4/24	Preparing for Finals, summary review of key takeaways.	News and Cases of the Week. Listen to a TBC celebrity podcast and discuss on Blackboard.	
Final Exam Period Date: 5/1, 7-9 p.m.	FINAL PRESENTATIONS		

Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

I expect all students to be respectful of one another, of the instructor, and of the guest speakers that we will welcome into the classroom (and via ZOOM) over the course of the semester. This means conducting yourselves in a professional manner and listening and engaging in thoughtful discussion. Participation is an important part of the grade. If you need to miss a class, please let me know ahead of time. Cell phones should be silenced or turned off and put away during the duration of the class, but may be checked during scheduled class breaks.

Communication

I am available via email at jamesmwa@usc.edu and will get back to you within 48 hours of your email OR 72 hours if sent over the weekend. I can also meet via ZOOM, or in person before class when previously scheduled. I encourage you to please reach out if you need anything or have any questions.

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 (1%) 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 or public relations class.*

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems Academic Conduct

The USC Student Handbook (https://policy.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/USC_StudentCode_August2022.pdf)

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at www.osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

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

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

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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.

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

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

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

[Annenberg Student Success Fund](#)

<https://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards>

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.

[Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund](#)

<https://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards>

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their

application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

About Your Instructor:

A Seattle native, James Ward III's passion for the entertainment industry sprouted through acting at age four. He has since had the opportunity of acting professionally and joined the Screen Actors Guild at age 10. James received his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from the University of Southern California in 2011. In 2016, James continued to pursue his career in Communications at OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network, leading publicity campaigns for Oscar-winner Tarell Alvin McCraney's critically-acclaimed series, *David Makes Man* achieving a Peabody Award win as well as Critic's Choice Award and Gotham Award nominations, Ava DuVernay's *Cherish the Day* and Mara Brock Akil's *Love Is*_. In 2019, James received the Shadow & Act "Behind-The-Scenes Rising Award" alongside Oscar-winner Barry Jenkins. In March 2021, James joined Netflix's Multicultural Publicity team leading campaigns that engaged Black audiences across the streamer's series, films and documentaries including such titles as *The Harder They Fall*, *Descendant*, *The Upshaws*, *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* and many more. As of January 2023, James took a leap of faith by leaving corporate entertainment PR to pursue screenwriting full-time and walk in his purpose via his company Draw 3 Entertainment, LLC. James's original screenplays have advanced to the quarterfinals in the WeScreenplay Diverse Voices, Screencraft Comedy and Macro Episodic Lab competitions. James currently does PR consulting for select clients as well. James also believes, "to whom much is given, much is required." With an understanding of this philosophy, James' philanthropic work includes mentoring for the USC Black Alumni Association's Legacy Through Leadership Mentoring Program; and sitting on the planning committee for the Annual Truth Awards, a scholarship gala that honors the Black LGBTQ+ community and its allies. James has golfed since age seven, loves horseback riding and has a sweet and fluffy 2-year-old mini labradoodle named Mercer with his own Instagram page. James is also a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the Screen Actors Guild and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (Public Relations Peer Group).