Strategic Communication  Fall 2011

Instructor:  Nancy Severance Roylance
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Time:  Wednesday: 6:45-8:25 pm; October 26-December 8
Office Hours:  by appointment
Course Location:  Tisch, LC9

Course Goal:
Effective communications are vital for the success of nonprofit and public organizations - as much if not more so than for-profit organizations. And since most nonprofits have limited staff and financial capacity for communications efforts, it is critical to deploy these resources as strategically as possible. Concepts and skills developed in this course will help students approach communications in a way that builds commitment to their organization’s mission, strategic initiatives and fundraising activities. Students will gain familiarity with a variety of communications techniques and vehicles, and complete a basic communications plan for a selected organization.

Performance Evaluation:
Messages Assignment: 10%
Press Release: 10%
Final Assignment Paper: 65% (team)
Final Assignment Presentation: 5% (team)
Tactical Communications Product: 10%

Final Project:
Working in 4 person teams, students will develop an 8-12 page communications plan addressing a specific challenge or opportunity for a government or nonprofit agency – ideally an organization that one member of the pair works or volunteers for, or is otherwise familiar with. The communications plan will include the following sections:
- Organization Background/Goals
- Situation Analysis
- Objectives
- Key audiences/publics
- Messages
- Strategies and tactics
- Implementation timeline
- Evaluation plan

Each student will also develop a tactical “product” to support the plan (brochure text, press release, direct mail text, event plan, website plan, newsletter, social marketing campaign plan, etc.) and submit it with his/her team’s plan. Each team will deliver a brief in-class presentation providing an executive level overview of its plan and tactics; presentations will be scheduled in the final session of the class. The tactical “products” will be graded individually, while the final assignment paper and class presentation will be graded as a team effort.
Text:
Required:

Ronald D. Smith
Routledge, 2009

David Meerman Scott, 2010

Additional readings may be assigned and distributed in class or via Blackboard.

October 26: Introduction
- Course goals and requirements
- What makes communication “strategic”?
- Foundation and elements of a communications plan

Assignment: Submit the short survey you will receive by email, by October 25

November 2:
- Research
- Publics
- Goals and Objectives
- Frames and Messages

Assigned Reading: Smith – Chapters page 17-137

Research Assignment for class discussion: how is Occupation Wall Street begin “framed” by various perspectives?

Written assignment:
Time will be provided at the end of class for formation of 8 teams of 4 students each (1 will have 5.). To facilitate this process, all students who have an organization they would like to propose should post a brief (no more than 2 pages) overview that includes your proposed organization, mission and broad goals, the communications challenge or opportunity you would like to address, your relationship with the organization, on Blackboard by 5pm on November 1. Some of you, especially full time students, may have difficulty identifying an organization and challenge you’d like to suggest. However, to ensure enough options for team projects, all students are encouraged to submit their ideas. Given the short duration of the course it is strongly recommended that you choose a communications challenge with narrow enough scope to enable you to develop a specific goal – e.g. “Build awareness and participation in new preventive care services for diabetics in the Bronx” or “Increase staff understanding and buy-in for new strategic plan” or “Increase visibility of your organization leaders with New York Influentials,” NOT: “Rebrand my organization.” Students are required to review potential projects on Blackboard prior to the November 2 class, and come to class prepared to identify the projects they are most interested in.
November 9: Communications Tactics
- Overview
- Media Relations

Assigned Reading:
Smith, 137-182; Appendix D
Scott, Chapters 7, 17-19

Written assignments:
1) 1-2 page strategic message related to your team project, using the model discussed in November 2 class. (This is NOT in your text.) Include a short overview of the communications challenge you address, and identify your target public for this message. Note: Project team members are required to work independently and submit separate papers. While it is recommend that you focus on your team project in this exercise, you may also choose another communications challenge you are more familiar with from your own professional or volunteer experience or an issue – e.g. childhood obesity, wilderness protection, voter registration – that is important to you. IMPORTANT: make sure your message is public-specific! And write it as a direct message to your public – don’t describe it!

2) Each team must also submit a project overview to include the following: 1) brief background on your selected “client” organization; 2) a brief but clear situation analysis including the communications challenge or opportunity you will address in your plan; 3) the public(s) you would like to focus on and why. (Note: while a complete plan would likely address multiple publics, for your course project select no more than two publics with high importance to your organization and issue.) Submit one overview per team and include a list of all team members.

November 16: More on Tactics
- Branding
- Advertising
- Brochures and collateral materials
- Events

Assigned reading:
Smith, 183-254

Written Assignment:
2-3 page press release supporting your communications plan. Use format outline provided in class on November 9 and on Blackboard. Note: This is NOT in your text. PROOFREAD CAREFULLY! Include a target media list. Media list may include specific outlets or reporters, but it is sufficient to identify categories of media outlets, reporter beats, etc. Note: Team members are required to work independently and submit separate papers. While it is highly recommend that you focus on your team project in this exercise, you may choose another communications challenge you are more familiar with from your own professional or volunteer experience or an issue – e.g. childhood obesity, wilderness
protection, voter registration – that is important to you. If you do so, include a very brief statement of your objective and the public you want to reach through media.

**Research Assignment**
Bring an example of any communications tactical product to class – brochure, press release, print ad, op-ed column, web page, etc. - produced by your “client” organization and be prepared to discuss its messages, target publics, and whether you think it is effective, and why or why not.

**November 23: Social Media and more**
- Websites
- Social Marketing
- Crisis Communications

**Reading Assignment:**
Scott, 1-54; 107-139; 159-192

**November 30:**
- Timelines
- Evaluation planning
- Selling your plan to managers, funders, etc.

**Reading Assignment:**
Smith, 253-296

**December 7: Final Class**
- Student Presentations – (8 teams – 15 minutes each)
- Wrap-Up

**December 16: Final Projects due in my mailbox at the Puck Building or via email to nseverance@audubon.org AND ns382@nyu.edu NO LATER THAN 5PM.**