



Master's Degree Program in Strategic Communications

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS
IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Instructor: D. Bates
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Section 003

717 Hamilton:

Wednesday: 6:10-8:00 pm

Course Description

Communications professionals in business, government and the not-for-profit sector are challenged as never before to develop coherent, ethical, effective and compelling communications in order to advance the interests of their organizations.

This course will provide an introduction to how these communications are and should be practiced. More specifically, the course will focus on the thinking and actions required to communicate strategically in today's dynamic socio-economic environment. In addition, it will provide theoretical and practical knowledge about what we mean by "strategic communications" and why they are critical to organizational success.

Students will learn about the skills and information they must master in order to handle strategic communications. They will also learn about the major communications disciplines -- public relations, marketing, and advertising -- and sub-sets such as direct marketing, on-line communications and internal communications. And they will learn about their responsibilities as professionals charged with the role of delivering strategic communications.

Class Format

The course is composed of lectures, readings, class and group discussions, guest speakers, case studies, and weekly assignments. Additionally, students are required to develop a strategic communications plan (SCP) for an organization of their own choosing. They will present their plans to their classmates during two classes toward the end of the semester.

Grading

Students will be graded as follows on the basis of their overall performance:

- A = excellent (90-100)
- B = good (80-89.9)
- C = fair (70-79.9)

Plus and minus grades are also used, except with D

- D = poor but passing (60-69.9)
- F = failure (the grade of F is a final grade and is not subject to reexamination)

Weekly assignments will be graded accordingly. Final grades are calculated by the following proportional percentages:

- Class/group participation: 10%
- Attendance/tardiness: 10%
- Written assignments: 30%
- Final project plan: 50% (45% written; 5% oral)

In grading written assignments and final projects, instructors will consider such factors as students' resourcefulness, creativity, writing, organization and attention to detail.

Students are required to participate fully in all class discussions and to arrive on time and remain until the end of classes. Unexcused absences will be graded "0." Students will also be given a "0" grade for assignments that are not submitted on time.

Strategic Communications Plan

The required strategic communications plan (SCP) must include a realistic communications strategy and achievable communications goals for a real-life organization. By the end of the fifth class, students will submit a proposed outline.

As students develop their plans, they should build in "hard" evidence to substantiate the need for and practicality of what is proposed. Personal views and experiences, although helpful, are insufficient. Thus, research, both primary and secondary, is a key component of strategic communications planning.

Students in previous semesters have used a variety of research approaches, including executive interviews, customer and client surveys, "intercept" or "person on the street" interviews, online questionnaires, employee surveys, and analyses of competitor strengths and weaknesses.

The best plans are also measurable. Thus, evaluation is another key component of the SCP process. Students in previous semesters have incorporated benchmark studies, before and after surveys and mail/fax/e-mail surveys.

Required Texts

- ***The Communication Plan: The Heart of Strategic Communication***, Lester R. Potter, International Association of Business Communicators, 2001.
- ***Corporate Communication***. Paul A. Argenti. McGraw-Hill, 2003.
- ***Promotion & Integrated Marketing Communications***. Richard J. Semenik. South-Western, 2002.
- **"Strategic Communications"** Coursepack, 2003.

Required Daily Review

Students must read the business pages, ad and marketing columns, and news and feature stories that cover marketing, public relations, advertising and other aspects of strategic communications.

- *The New York Times*
- *The Wall Street Journal*

Recommended Weekly Review

Students should review the major trade magazines and/or associated Web sites that cover advertising, marketing and public relations. Here are a few of the most important

- Advertising Age
- ADWEEK
- Brandweek
- Odwyerpr.com
- PR Week

Class Outline

1. **Tuesday, September 2, 2003**

Introductions, expectations, Library Resources workshop

Reading for next class:

Argenti. Chapter 1: The Changing Environment for Business, pp. 1-20.

Potter. Chapter 1: Introduction to Strategic Planning, pp. 1-7. Chapter 2: The Practice of Strategic Planning, pp. 8-15. Chapter 3-6: The Strategic Plan in Four Parts, Parts 1-4, pp. 16-65. Chapter 11: The Ten-Step Strategic Communication Plan, Step 4, pp. 97-113.

Semenik. Chapter 1: Introduction to Promotion and Integrated Marketing Communications, pp. 2-31.

Coursepack. “American Cancer Society Case Study,” Schultz, et al. “Marketing Myopia” and “Creativity Is Not Enough,” Theodore Levitt.

Assignment due for week 2:

- Analyze American Cancer Society Case and in a 3-5 page double-spaced paper, articulate what you believe are the critical elements – the pieces that made the biggest difference to the plan’s success. Explain what impact they had on the success of the plan and why you think they are critical. In addition, what is the main goal? What is the main strategy? Be prepared to discuss your views in class.

- BRING POTTER BOOK AND COURSEPACK TO CLASS NEXT WEEK.

2. Tuesday, September 9, 2003

The 10-step strategic communications plan (SCP) and what contributes to its success

Students will break into groups to discuss the ACS case.

Students will be introduced to the 10-step SCP (Potter, p. 69), emphasizing research and the situation analysis and how each of these pieces influences planning. We will also discuss the relevance of mission, vision and values to the development of an SCP, and the differences between goals, objectives, strategy and tactics. In addition, we will explore how messages are discerned through the SCP process.

Reading for next class:

Argenti. Chapter 2: Communicating Strategically, pp. 21-36. Chapter 3: An Overview of the Corporate Communications Function, pp. 37-56.

Potter. Chapters 7: Strategic Communication Planning, pp. 66-72. Chapters 8-10: Strategic Communication Planning -- The Ten-Step Strategic Communication Plan, Steps 1-3, pp. 73-96. Appendix B: Introduction to Sample Strategic Communication Plans, pp. 279-282 and AAPC Case, pp. 283-297.

Coursepack. "Toward Strategic Communication: One Department's Journey," David Moorcroft. "Strategy Is Everything: Planning the Direction of the Communications Program," Schultz.

Assignment due for Week 3:

- In a 3-5-page paper, describe an organization, possibly your own, for which you would like to develop an SCP as your final project. Speak with the appropriate communications executives or other officers to identify the business challenges that might benefit from a strategic communications plan. (See Potter's interview guide in Chapter 11, p. 98, for questions to ask). Write a description of the organization, an overview of what you believe to be the business challenges, and a summary of how a communications plan might help in their resolution.

3. Tuesday, September 16, 2003

Proposed projects – operations vs. communications

Students will share their proposals with classmates and discuss the issues and barriers that might hamper their efforts. They will also have an opportunity to assist their classmates in articulating their proposed plans.

Reading for next class:

Potter. Chapters 12-18: Strategic Communication Planning-The Ten-Step Strategic Communication Plan, Steps 5-10, pp. 114-154.

Semenik. Chapter 3: "Promotion and IMC Planning and Strategy," pp. 62-113.

Coursepack. “The Tipping Point,” Malcolm Gladwell. “The Milk Carton Case,” Shultz. “Managing the Multiple Identities of the Corporation,” John Balmer and Stephen Greyser.

Assignment due for Week 4

- Analyze the Milk Carton Case from the Coursepack and write a 3-5 page paper on the role of strategy in planning and executing the case and defining the major goal.

4. Tuesday, September 23, 2003

Thinking and acting strategically

A strategic communications plan helps to articulate the mission and direction of an organization. It is in sync with the organization’s business goals and values. In this class, we will deconstruct the Milk Carton Case to determine what its critical elements are, drilling down to the essence of what was done to achieve its goals.

Reading for next class:

Argenti. Chapter 4: Identity, Image and Reputation, pp. 57-80, and Chapter 6: Media Relations, pp. 102-124.

Semenik. Chapter 4: Understanding the Market Environment for Promotion and IMC, pp. 114-147. Chapter 5: Understanding Buyer Behavior and Communication Processes, pp. 148-187.

Coursepack. “The Spin Myth,” Malcolm Gladwell.

Assignment due for Week 5

- Finalize your choice of the organization for which you will develop a strategic communications plan as your final project (50% of final grade). Secure approval from the organization’s executives. In a 3-5 page draft, summarize the organization’s mission, the project’s “SMART” goal (see Potter, Chapter 5), the communications team’s roles and titles, and your methodology for completing the plan, addressing each of Potter’s ten steps and including a timeline. Be as specific as possible. This is NOT the SCP, but a roadmap to its completion. Initiate research ASAP.

5. Tuesday, September 30, 2003

Major tools and tactics of strategic communications

We will explore the difference between “tools” and “tactics” used to convey messages to target audiences. How do we determine what tools and tactics to use? Do we use one tool such as advertising or public relations or do we use a mix of several? How do we determine what will be most effective? Are there limits to what we can do?

Reading for next class:

Semenik. Chapters 10: Direct Marketing and E-Commerce, pp. 340-379. Chapter 11: Sales Promotion: Consumer, Trade and Business Market Techniques, pp. 380--413. Chapter 12: Sponsorship, Point-of-Purchase, and Supportive Communications, pp. 414-447.

Coursepack. "Research Doesn't Have to Put You in the Poor House," Walter Lindeman. "Public Relations," Don Bates.

Assignment due for Week 6

- No paper due. Work on research and other aspects of your plan.

6. Tuesday, October 7, 2003

Public relations: The power of publicity and beyond.

Since World War II, public relations as a professional communications function has emerged as a respectable and powerful communications function that can foster public good. We will discuss how public relations professionals do their work -- both within agencies and organizations -- and address fundamental questions: What can public relations accomplish? What are its major functions? Why is publicity so important?

Argenti. Chapter 5: Corporate Advertising, pp. 81-100.

Semenik. Chapter 13: Public Relations and Corporate Advertising, pp. 448-473.

Coursepack. "Toward an Understanding of How News Coverage and Advertising Impact Consumer Perceptions, Attitudes and Behavior," Bruce Jeffries-Fox. "Advertising Law & Ethics," Department of Advertising, The University of Texas at Austin. "The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding," Al Ries.

Assignment due for Week 7:

- Refine your project proposal so that you have an effective working outline from which to craft your final plan. In addition, write the background, situation analysis, and research/methodology. Turn the assignment in with a copy of your first draft from week 5, including instructor's notes.

7. Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Branding and Identity

Brand, the seemingly ubiquitous word in the world of marketing and in strategic communications generally, is one of the most important concepts to understand. What exactly does brand mean? What do brand equity, brand promise, and e-branding mean? What are the image and identity of an organization? We will discuss the implications of branding and how strategic communications supports and promotes brands.

Reading for next class:

Semenik. Chapter 8: Advertising Messages and Media Strategies, pp. 260-299.

Assignment due for Week 9 (October 28th):

- Group assignment. Collaborate with an assigned group of classmates to complete the following project. What is the “brand” (actual, perceived, real, etc.) of McDonald’s. What is their competition? Is the brand aligned with the organization’s mission statement and communications initiatives? What is their product mix? Each group will jointly present their views in class for 10-15 minutes. In addition, the group will submit one paper summarizing its findings. The paper should include a summary by each participant of his/her contribution and comments on the relevance of the collaborative process. The same grade will be given to each person in the group, though individual submissions will be considered during final evaluation.

8. Tuesday, October 21, 2003

Developing targeted messages for the appropriate audiences.

Crafting controlled messages and presenting them to various target audiences is one of the most common methods of professional communications. What are the differences between advertising and public relations messages? Amidst the din, how do communications professionals successfully mount communications campaigns that reach and influence target markets? What is the difference between paid and public service advertising? How does word “get around” about a product or an institution or an event? What is “buzz” and how is it created?

Reading for next class:

None

Assignment due for Week 9:

- None. Work on brand assignment and SCP.

9. Tuesday, October 28, 2003

Group Brand Presentations

Reading for next class:

Argenti. Chapter 8: Investor Relations, pp. 125-160, and Chapter 10: Crisis Communications, pp. 193-225.

Coursepack. “Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators,” IABC. “Code of Professional Standards,” PRSA.

Assignment due for week 10:

- Provide an outline of your SCP’s key messages and the **communications** tactics you plan to use to deliver them. Identify target audiences and Target Buying Incentive (TBI) -- See Coursepack, “Strategy is Everything.,” Schultz. Be specific, e.g. “pitch an article to the New York Times’ food editor on the perils of plastic milk

packaging and the benefits of paper to consumers,” rather than “pitch a newspaper article.” Submit the outline of messages via email by November 4.

November 4 – NO CLASS – ELECTION DAY
VOTE!

10. November 11, 2003

Internal communications: The role employees and other "insiders" play in strategic communications

One of the most overlooked aspects of strategic communications is how we communicate within organizations, with employees in particular. CEOs and other top managers in the public and private sectors, whether they fully realize it, have both internal and external audiences to deal with that are key to their success. Is there a difference between internal and external communications? Is the strategy the same for both forms of communications? Are there different tactics we should employ to tell our stories to each audience? How do organizational and political concerns affect internal communications?

Reading for next class:

Semenik: Chapter 15: Measuring the Effectiveness of Promotion and IMC, pp. 510-547.

Assignment due for week 11:

- In a 3-5 page paper, summarize and explain the measurement and evaluation methods you will use to determine the effectiveness of your SCP and what you expect to learn from each method. Remember to tie evaluation to goals.

11. Tuesday, November 18, 2003

Credibility, accountability and responsibility: The role of ethics in strategic communications.

Do communications professionals have ethical obligations as they shape their strategic communications plans? Do they have a responsibility to tell the truth? What role does ethical behavior play in the development of communications plans?

Reading for next class:

None.

Assignment due for Week 12:

- Prepare for class presentations.
- Hand in final project

12. Tuesday, November 25, 2003

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Students will present their final strategic communications plans. They will have a maximum allotted time for making their presentations based on the number of students in the class – e.g., 7-10 minutes. Each presentation should be organized and delivered as if it were being given to top management or another key constituency in the organization for which it was developed.

13. Tuesday, December 2, 2003

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

14. Tuesday, December 9, 2003

FINAL CLASS

Wrap-Up, Course Evaluation

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