

**Communications Studies (COMS) 383 – Lec 01**  
**Introduction to Public Relations**  
**Winter 2012**  
**Saturdays, 1:00–4:30 p.m.**  
**on Jan. 14/21/28, Feb. 4/11/18/25, Mar. 3/10/17/24/31, Apr. 7**

**Instructor:** Geo Takach  
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**Web page:** Blackboard  
**Office hours:** by appointment

**Course description**

This course introduces students to the principles, theories and practices and of public relations as a professional field, its historical development, its role in organizations and society, and its future directions. Topics include public relations research and planning, strategic messaging, ethics and issues management, and foundations in communication theory. The course provides an opportunity to build on students' oral and written communication skills. Students will be required to participate actively in class discussions and, as a group project, to prepare a communications plan and present it to the class.

**Course objectives**

- To develop students' skills in the field of public relations
- To develop students' understanding of the role and challenges of public relations in organizations and society through focused analysis and case studies
- To develop students' critical thinking through examination, analysis and discussion of public relations cases
- To introduce students to key concepts, theoretical underpinnings and practices of public relations.

**Internet and electronic communication**

Please write "COMS 383" in the subject line of e-mail messages sent to the instructor. Messages should be addressed and written in a courteous and professional manner.

Laptop computers may be used to take notes during class. Do not use your laptop to view content or to do work unrelated to the content covered in class that day. Cell phones and all recording devices must be turned off during class.

**Textbook**

Heath, Robert L. and W. Timothy Coombs. *Today's Public Relations: An Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.

**Assignments and Evaluation****Quiz #1**

25% of course grade, due February 11

This in-class quiz will contain short-answer, short-essay and possibly also multiple-choice questions. It will cover material in assigned readings of the required text, lecture material and all other material covered to that point in the course.

**Quiz #2**

25% of course grade, due March 24

Thus quiz will contain short-answer, short-essay and possibly also multiple-choice questions. It will cover all material covered to date, focusing on material in assigned readings of the required text, lecture material and all other material covered in class since Quiz #1 or not covered in Quiz #1.

**Group project**

40% of course grade

Students will work in teams of five to complete a project over the duration of the course. (No individual projects will be permitted.) The project comprises three parts: (1) a written proposal comprising a preliminary analysis and research plan of 2–3 pages in length; (2) a written communications plan of 10–12 pages in length; and (3) a 15-minute presentation of that plan to the class. The grading weight and due dates are as follows:

Proposal:	10% (due January 28)
Communications plan:	20% (due March 31)
Presentation in class:	10% (March 31 or April 7, depending on your group)

Further details of the project will be announced in class.

Failure to complete any assignment may result in a grade of F in the course.

**Participation (10%)**

Reflecting the desired professionalism and the collaborative nature of the practice of public relations, regular attendance and participation in class activities is an important part of the course. COMS 383 is designed to reinforce students' learning and mastery of the material through active engagement and experience.

**Submission of assignments**

Students are responsible for keeping a copy of each submitted assignment. Please hand in assignments directly to your instructor if possible. Otherwise, SS-320 has a daytime drop-box, with a date-stamp provided for your use. A night drop-box is also available for submission after hours, in which case assignments will be removed the next workday morning, stamped with the previous day's date and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

**Policy for late assignments**

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A– to B+) for each day late.

**Registrar-scheduled final examination**

None

**Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, *students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name and their student ID number on the front page. You will be required to provide a piece of picture-identification to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS-320 after classes have ended.* For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

**Writing skills statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details, see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.), but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. For details, see <http://www.efwr.ucalgary.ca>.

**Grading system**

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture (revised, effective September 2008):

Grade	Grading scale
A+	96-100
A	90-95.99
A -	85-89.99
B+	80-84.99
B	75-79.99
B-	70-74.99
C+	65-69.99
C	60-64.99
C-	55-59.99
D+	53-54.99
D	50-52.99
F	0-49

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. That is, an A– would be converted to 87.5 for calculation purposes. An F will be converted to zero.

**Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university. You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources. Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (MacEwan Student Centre, 4th floor, <http://www.efwr.ucalgary.ca>) if you have any questions on how to document sources.

**Academic misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the current University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>.

**Students with disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

**Students' Union**

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts, see <http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html>.

**Student Ombudsperson**

For details on the Student Ombudsperson's office, see <http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/page/quality-education/academic-services/student-rights>.

**Emergency evacuation and assembly points**

For information on emergency evacuation procedures and assembly points, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>.

**“SAFEWALK” program (220-5333)**

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night. Call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking-lot booths.

**Ethics**

You may be expected to participate as subjects or researchers when research on human subjects may take place.

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see the Department of Communication and Culture's research ethics site (<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>) or the University of Calgary's research ethics site (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreh>).

**Schedule of lectures and readings**

A schedule of classes with details of assignments and required readings will be available on Blackboard.