

Teaching Portfolio

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The dominant paradigm in public relations calls for symmetry between an organization and its publics. Based on Jurgen Habermas' concept of an "ideal speech situation," this paradigm suggests that even though an organization may be more powerful than its constituents, the relationship between them can still be ethical if the organization engages in real dialogue and relationship building with other groups. This model is idealistic, however, and rarely describes what actually happens in organizations. This is reflected in how public relations is usually taught: one study found that although the most popular PR textbooks all advocate symmetry, the majority of each book focuses on how to persuade publics to agree with the organization's views.

In contrast, the "new PR" stems from social media communication channels like blogging that allow for dialogue and collaborative decision-making between an organization and members of its publics. Its primary characteristics include conversation, transparency, loss of control, collaboration, multiple methods of message delivery, and authenticity. These characteristics mirror many of my beliefs about what happens in the classroom. Like good public relations, good teaching relies on effective and ethical communication.

As I see it, my responsibility as a teacher is to facilitate learning by developing a role for students in creating and sharing knowledge. Because I see learning as active and collaborative, I try to develop **conversation** between instructor and students, student and other students, and students and outside sources ranging from reference librarians to public relations professionals. For example, I routinely require students to work in teams, make oral presentations to classmates, post comments on Weblogs about public relations, and write public relations materials based on current public relations cases or for actual clients.

Transparency in teaching refers to explaining to students what we're doing and why. Sometimes this occurs in the classroom, as when I tell students which clients they'll be working with or why we're studying one organization rather than another. But it also happens on my blog, Teaching PR (<http://teachingpr.blogspot.com>), where I write about issues relating to teaching and where students, former students, and anyone else is free to comment on what I write. I have used the blog to develop assignments, discuss curricular issues, communicate with professionals, and even just complain. Transparency leads to another characteristic, however, that isn't always easy: **loss of control**. As soon as I post on my blog, I lose control of what other people think or say about what I've written, and people frequently post comments disagreeing with what I've said. Of course, like a large corporation, a blogger never has control of what people think or say; what's different is that open communication by its nature *invites* criticism as well as praise. If people learn most through exchange, then the conversation should lead to better teaching and learning over time. The trick for the teacher is to find a balance between control and collaboration. A former student characterized this by comparing teachers to blog hosts: "They lead the discussion threads and engage in dialogue, which allows them to still have some control."

Although my teaching load centers on undergraduate public relations courses, I have found that **collaboration** works in other classes as well. When I teach graduate seminars, whether on public relations or on media history, students are expected to produce original research, but I ask them to collaborate in the sense that throughout the semester they are given opportunities to share problems and ask each other questions about their work. These discussions range from advice on relevant communication theories to more mundane topics like how to search Internet databases more effectively. Whenever possible, I also offer students the opportunity to contribute to decision-making about which topics should be covered in a course and to follow up on things that interest them. After a seminar on PR management, for example, a group of five students worked with me on an independent study about catastrophe management, which included a trip to New York City to meet with experts on crisis communication. I also ask graduate students to serve as discussion leaders so that I am in a position to learn as well as teach in my seminars.

One of the criticisms of the idea of “new PR” is that it hasn’t really displaced the “old” public relations. The practice is still grounded in persuasion; most people don’t use blogs or other social media; and most organizations aren’t willing to cede control of decision-making to collaborative conversations. This also applies to teaching. There are specific theories, principles, formats, and methods that students must learn in order to perform in their jobs and to understand the field. This means that the lecture-discussion format, like traditional PR methods, remains an important part of teaching, one that I certainly have not abandoned. However, I find the new emphasis on **multiple methods of message delivery** worthy of emulation. I develop course packets for virtually all of my classes that serve in addition to or in place of textbooks, for example, because I like to draw material from a wide range of sources and to present case examples that match theory with practice. As I see it, my role is to present information, make resources available, point students in different directions, give a variety of assignments that require different types of learning, and allow students to take charge of their own education.

Active learning and collaborative learning are popular buzzwords now, and the use of the computer or Internet in teaching is frequently advocated as appealing to the current generation of students. I have always focused on “participation” or “hands-on” work, because this is inherent in public relations practice. This, to me, is where **authenticity** comes in. It seems only appropriate to me to push past participation to collaboration by granting at least some of the power in the classroom to the students. This can mean transparency in admitting, “I don’t know, but let’s find out,” or collaborative decision-making in giving the students an assignment and letting them take charge of how they will approach it with only minimal guidance from me. By modeling characteristics like conversation, transparency, and collaboration, I can show students how the new PR might work and at the same time teach them to think critically and creatively, employ a variety of tools and methods, and become confident in their own abilities to identify and solve problems—skills that should serve them in public relations and in life.

Teaching Responsibilities

I have taught four of the six required courses in the undergraduate public relations sequence: Public Relations (introductory survey class), Administration (management and case studies), Communication (writing for print, video, and the Internet), and Campaigns (the capstone course). The sections that I have taught have typically ranged from 15 to 40 students. Each includes hands-on, skills-oriented work, such as writing a news release, as well as theory and critical thinking about public relations practice, such as analyzing how practitioners handled a particular situation and what resulted.

Undergraduate teaching also occurs outside the classroom. I have directed two Honors Program senior theses, supervised numerous Honors internships, served as an Honors faculty mentor, and team-taught a Franklin College Freshman Seminar on Propaganda (with Audrey Haynes, Political Science). I served as adviser to the UGA chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America for two years and have advised the chapter's Bateman Team in the Public Relations Student Society of America's national case study competition three times.

At the graduate level, I have taught multiple sections of Historical Methods in Mass Communication; Public Relations Management; and several special topics courses, Public Relations Foundations, The Anti-Corporate Movement and American Media, Propaganda in American Media, Propaganda in U.S. History, and Mass Communication and Social Problems. There are typically 5-10 students per section, although PR Management had 28 students. In the seminars, especially the history classes, I blend content with theory and method.

As with the undergraduates, some of the most important work with graduate students happens in one-on-one mentoring. I have directed two doctoral theses and served on numerous Ph.D. committees in the Grady College and one in Speech Communication. Eleven master's students have completed theses under my direction, with others in progress, and many others have completed the non-thesis option under my supervision. I have also served on more than a dozen M.A. thesis committees for students in Public Relations and Journalism.

Course Materials

In this section, I reflect on four courses that have been a significant part of my teaching responsibilities. Two are undergraduate courses that I have taught consistently since 1993, Public Relations Administration (ADPR 5910) and Public Relations Communication (ADPR 5920). The others are graduate seminars, Historical Methods in Mass Communication (JRMC 9040), and a special topics class on anti-corporate movements (JRMC 8160).

I reviewed three syllabi/course schedules, from Winter 1994, Fall 1998, and Maymester 2006 (for copies, see Appendix A), to analyze how I have organized PR Administration over time. In many respects, I have been consistent in how I taught the class. I have always emphasized strategic planning, management systems, and the application of theory and research to solving PR problems—in fact, I note that some of the wording regarding these topics from the original syllabus survives into the most recent. I also relied on team work and included some form of oral presentation as well as significant written assignments and exams.

Yet I find that my teaching has changed in several significant ways. First, I note a growing emphasis on ethics and social responsibility in readings and assignments. This is a reflection of my own interest in these topics, fostered by an awareness that my students were going out into the world and presenting information and persuasive messages about clients that I had no control over—or even input on, and by my own increasing knowledge about major issues in the field. Second, I note significantly more varied methods of message delivery. In early years, I relied almost completely on the lecture-discussion format and on written exams for grades. In 2006, in addition to PowerPoint lectures, I used videos (including documentaries and a drama), guest speakers, blog readings and postings, in-class projects such as role play, and student presentations (press conferences and a debate) to raise important issues and encourage student participation.

Third, the syllabi reveal an increasing willingness on my part to move away from the use of textbooks with course topics and examples selected by expert authors. The 1994 class, from the first year I taught at UGA, is organized around two textbooks and a supplementary reading packet. By 1998, I had adopted a monograph on ethics but drew the bulk of reading assignments from scholarly journals, popular magazines (e.g., *Fortune*) and trade publications (e.g., *PR Strategist*). In 2006, I turned to an extended case, involving Wal-Mart, based on a book with very little mention of public relations as a management function, by a business writer with no PR background. Migrating from paper to WebCT also allowed me supplement the book with readings from a variety of popular and scholarly sources including blogs and other Web sites (unfortunately, these links do not show up on the course calendar included in the Appendix). In retrospect, I believe these changes signal increasing confidence in my ability to understand and explain real-life situations to my students, rather than relying on prepackaged outlines and cases, and a growing commitment to the principle of conversation as opposed to monologue and to multiple methods of message delivery.

Finally, I believe my ability to prepare exams and assignments has improved over time. I am especially satisfied with the exams from the Maymester 2006 class (see Appendix A), which utilized “forward-looking assessment,” testing students’ ability to use course material meaningfully rather than recall or recognition. I feel that the tests are reasonable assessments of learning as well as predictors of success in the field.

The PR Communication class is an important one in terms of student success in entry-level public relations. My emphasis in this class has been on writing, writing and more writing. As with Administration, in PR Communication I have worked over time to build a reading packet to supplement the textbook and to base my assignments more and more on real situations rather than hypothetical scenarios. I have made an effort to include diverse clients and situations to give students the opportunity to hone their public relations instincts in addition to their writing skills. I asked a Grady faculty member who teaches the class and has significant public relations experience, Dr. Betty Jones, to review a sample of the course assignments (see Appendix A) and assess their usefulness to students, based on my stated course objectives of giving students the opportunity to master the techniques of writing for public relations; using the most common PR tactics; and developing an understanding of the communication theories and practices that inform PR techniques. She stated that she believes the assignments are “ideal” for the class, citing especially the contact list assignment, because “they require thought and organization as well as an assessment of writing skills.”

At the graduate level I believe my most important role in course development is the construction of the reading list. I build Historical Methods on book reading because books are considered the most important form of publication for historians. In the past I have made an effort to include a broad range of readings in terms of media and era, but for Spring 2007 (see reading list in Appendix A) I decided to include two surveys, one on press freedom and the other on the African-American press, and base the rest on 20th century media. Because it is the era that I am personally most interested in, I feel not only better equipped to lead discussions, but more enthusiastic and hopefully more capable of conveying that enthusiasm to the students. (Students are encouraged to select subjects and time periods for their original research projects according to their own interests.)

The most challenging course reading list I have developed was for a special topics class, The Anti-corporate Movement and American Media. The subject was entirely new to me, so I had to develop topics and find readings starting from scratch. I decided to begin each week’s readings with a theoretical piece on such topics as social movements, globalization of the media, and corporate social responsibility, and to conclude with a case study illustrating or testing the theory. The readings were drawn from scholarly journals in sociology, communication, and international relations, as well as books, Web sites, trade publications, and the popular press (see reading list in Appendix A).

Student Learning and Advancement

In this section I focus on Public Relations Campaigns (ADPR 5950), which I first began teaching in 2003 because I wanted a new challenge. This class is important to me because, by its nature, it offers wonderful opportunities to develop “new PR” principles like conversation, collaboration, transparency, and loss of control. As the capstone course for our program, Campaigns requires students to work in teams all semester long on one major project, the preparation of a public relations plan for a real client. The teams turn to me for direction, but I try to guide them rather than tell them what to do.

The first time I taught the class, I was surprised by how unprepared I felt, and I expected the students to have more knowledge, skills, and experience than they actually brought to the classroom. So, the second time I taught it, I administered a pretest to evaluate student confidence in their skills and abilities to conduct a public relations campaign. The pretest asked students to rank themselves on about a dozen statements about basic skills and tools, such as “I know how to write a moderator’s guide for a focus group” (they selected on a range from strongly agree to strongly disagree). From 21 usable tests, only two items showed significant concern on the students’ part: “I am confident that I can analyze the results of focus groups and surveys to help develop a public relations program,” and “I would be nervous if I had to attend a meeting with a new client or employer.”

I addressed these concerns by providing readings, discussing them in class, asking two former students to post on the class Weblog comments about how their organizations use research to develop PR programs, and inviting another former student to guest lecture on giving client presentations. I then asked the same questions on a post-test, completed by 19 students, which indicated that *all* students selected “agree” or “strongly agree” for the item “I am confident that I can analyze the results of focus groups and surveys to help develop a public relations program.” Six students who had originally circled neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree had improved significantly in their self-confidence about this aspect of public relations practice. Another half dozen who originally circled agree also improved to strongly agree. Analysis of the second item of concern, “I would be nervous if I had to attend a meeting with a new client or employer,” yielded mixed results. Although many students indicated less nervousness after having experienced meeting with their clients, others indicated that they were now *more* nervous. It seems that confidence in the area of professional presentation is not easily taught, or that these students had a new respect for the importance of client meetings.

Finally, the post-test also asked students in what way their PR skills had changed as a result of the class. In these open-ended remarks, most comments fell into three basic categories: students said that they had developed a better understanding of the entire process of public relations; that they learned how to work effectively as part of a team; and that they felt more confident in their abilities. These comments mesh well with three major learning outcomes I identified before the semester began (see syllabus in Appendix B): solving public relations problems, working with teams, and emerging prepared to begin working as PR professionals.

As part of the Campaigns class I have also advised the team representing the University of Georgia in the Public Relations Student Society of America's Bateman Case Study Competition. The team conducts a campaign for a client selected by PRSSA's national office, and then submits its report to be judged against other school's entrants. In 2006, the UGA team received an honorable mention for its work for Habitat for Humanity. In 2007, the UGA team won the competition, from a field of 64 entries, for Family Caregiving 101. In addition to the feedback from the judges, each year I provide team members with a two-page summary of the strengths and weaknesses of their campaign book and a page of comments on their client presentation, just as I do for the other teams in the class. (See Appendix B for the Executive Summary, Scoring Sheet, and Evaluations from 2006 and a PRSSA news release from 2007.) Although most feedback during the semester occurs during weekly team meetings, I feel it is important to provide written evaluation of the products of their work. This feedback is an important part of teaching, but it also serves as an assessment of student learning by showing what my students have learned or not learned during the semester, thus providing me with another indicator of areas that need more attention the next time I teach the class.

A last way to assess learning is to examine the career advancement of one's students. The Grady College produces many fine graduates in public relations, and I have former students who have gone to graduate school, opened their own small agencies, taken internships and entry-level positions at major agencies, religious organizations, and hospitals, and gone to work for large corporations like Lockheed-Martin, Coca-Cola, and BellSouth. I hesitate to take credit for any of their successes. Still, an examination of the unsolicited letters and e-mail messages I have received from former students suggests that I have been helpful to them in several ways. Students consistently comment on the fact that writing skills and examples from the course packet have been useful in their jobs or internships. For instance, a PR Communication student wrote, "The past few months I have spent more time getting adjusted to my new position... The information I learned in your class is coming in very handy." Another, from PR Administration, wrote, "I'm sitting here in my office writing our company's communication plan... I'm basing it entirely on the plan I wrote for your class as an undergraduate.... Just wanted to make sure to thank you because I don't know what I would do without it!"

Others offer thanks for help with career mentoring. "On the evening before graduation, I was offered a full-time position!" one student wrote. "I wanted to say a big THANK YOU for all of your help, support, suggestions and encouragement over the last 18 months...." In addition, former students have written to thank me for assistance in finding and getting admitted to graduate programs and law schools, and graduate students have commented favorably on my mentoring. A doctoral advisee told Grady's graduate director that I had been "invaluable in helping me turn my dissertation into marketable manuscripts," with a final tally of six publications, including articles in *Journalism and Communication Monographs* and *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, two of the top publications in our field. (See Student Comments in Appendix B.)

Teaching Evaluations

Student Evaluations

Quantitative Measures: I reviewed the scores from all the classes I taught from spring 2005, when the Grady College began using a new evaluation form, to spring 2007. The analysis is based on five questions which I think best reflect my teaching philosophy and the college's emphasis on competence and effectiveness. Eleven sections (four graduate and seven undergraduate) are included in the following average scores, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. (For scores by semester and course, see Appendix C.)

<u>Question</u>	<u>Average</u>
The instructor is a competent teacher for this course.	4.68
The instructor employed helpful and interesting teaching approaches.	4.37
In general, the instructor was an effective teacher.	4.61
The class helped me develop competence as an independent thinker.	4.34
The instructor motivated me to perform at my highest level.	4.40

Open-ended Remarks: In this section I provide a closer analysis of the student evaluations for ADPR 5910, Public Relations Administration, which I taught during Maymester 2006. Although this was the class I most frequently taught as an assistant professor, I completely overhauled it in 2006 after a four-year hiatus from teaching it. The syllabus is described in the above "Course Materials" section.

The comments indicate that students recognized and appreciated my efforts to include multiple methods of message delivery, collaborative learning, and conversation. Four praised the activities, such as a debate, in which students worked in teams to present material to the rest of the class. Four mentioned movies and the class material, particularly the Wal-Mart case, and two mentioned my general efforts to keep the class interested and motivated, particularly important because the class is taught in intense 3-hour daily time blocks. (Half of the negative comments concerned the scheduling.) Two students complained about the use of PowerPoint lectures, but most of the students were satisfied with my teaching, as reflected by a 4.65 out of 5.0 score on teaching effectiveness. (For a list of open-ended remarks, see Appendix C.)

Unsolicited Comments: In addition to formal evaluation measures, students at times provide feedback with unsolicited letters or e-mails. In many instances they have thanked me for assistance with their coursework. "I had to pull my notebook from 5910 this weekend for my campaigns class. I just wanted to say thanks for being a teacher where I can go back to my work and still learn from it," an Administration student wrote. "The event that I used for my project in PR comm actually took place," another wrote. "We had six groups participating in an all-night lock-in, and they raised over \$7,000 for the homeless...." And, "...you were a really great mentor and advisor to me and my team," a Campaigns student wrote. In addition, a graduate student noted, "Of all the papers I've written thus far for grad school, you provided the best comments." (For complete quotations, see Appendix C.)

Outside Evaluations

My teaching abilities have also been evaluated by peers and other non-students. Based on her evaluation of my Campaigns and PR Communication classes, Grady's Dr. Ruthann Lariscy concluded, "She motivates, helps her students develop self-reliance, has particularized learning objectives and outcomes that are achieved."

PR Campaigns clients have also commented that the students' work reflected favorably on my guidance. "We were so impressed with their poise in delivery, their thoroughness, and their creativity," one client wrote in an unsolicited letter from 2006. "It was evident that they have been well taught and well directed. You have every reason to be happy with what you have accomplished with them. We are in the process now of implementing many of the suggestions your class made." A 2007 client wrote, "I was very impressed with the work of your students. They showed us what a professional pr firm would do for a client" (see Client Comments in Appendix C).

I have also solicited formal evaluation from Campaigns clients. In 2007, seven people attended three client presentations, and scores for the teams averaged 4.7 out of 5 on the statement, "My overall impression of this campaign is favorable" and 4.4 on the statement, "The oral presentation was professional in quality." Open-ended remarks were also very positive, such as, "Information was clear, well-articulated, straight forward. Students were well prepared, very impressive."

The PRSSA Bateman case study competition judges have also assessed my students' work, as described above. In 2007, when the UGA team won the competition, the judges praised the students for thorough research, comprehensive strategies and tactics, and results that benefited the client and its constituents. The team prepared both a campaign book and an oral presentation for the client (included, along with a PRSSA news release about the team and competition, in Appendix C).

Activities to Improve Instruction and the Profession

I have worked to advance the teaching of public relations and of history in several ways. I have reviewed public relations textbooks for SAGE Publications, Allen & Bacon, and Guilford Press. As the Book Review Editor of *Journalism History*, although I am at the mercy of the market of new books, I strive to include at least one teaching or historical methods book in each issue. Making other instructors aware of new resources is a simple way to help improve instruction.

I have also been invited to participate in several panels on teaching at professional educators' meetings. I spoke on "Teaching History throughout the Curriculum" and "Embracing the Prodigal Researcher: The Status of Historical and Cultural Studies in Advertising and Public Relations" at meetings of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and on "Survival in the Curriculum: Broadening the Appeal of Media History" at the American Journalism Historians Association.

Much of my service to the university has also contributed to the teaching mission. As an elected member of the UGA Graduate Council, I served on the Curriculum and Admission/Retention committees. I also served on the Faculty Mentoring Awards committee and reviewed graduate student portfolios for the university's Teaching Portfolio Program. I served on the Graduate School Minority Recruitment and Retention Committee for three years and the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs' Academic Honesty panel for four. I also recently joined a Faculty Learning Community, sponsored by UGA's Center for Teaching and Learning, focusing on collaboration.

However, my Weblog, Teaching PR, has become my most significant activity to improve instruction and the profession. In my first post (April 2006), I explained two reasons for starting a blog: to give myself an opportunity to reflect on my teaching and how it can be improved, and to give non-academics a glimpse into what I do and why, in hopes of clearing up misconceptions among professionals who are often critical of entry-level public relations majors. Since that time I have found several other benefits. I've gotten class project ideas and feedback from practitioners, established online relationships with a few other PR instructors who are also blogging (there are only about 20 around the world), who have also given me ideas and advice, and reconnected with some of my former students who are now my readers. (Three sample blog posts and comments are located in Appendix D.)

Based on all I had learned through my blog and teaching experience, I wrote a refereed teaching paper, "Using Weblogs in Public Relations Education," which has been accepted for publication in the Fall, 2007 issue of "Teaching Public Relations," a publication of the AEJMC Public Relations Division. In addition, I am organizing a conference on public relations and social media to be held in October, 2007, in Athens.

Goals for Personal Advancement

This reflection on my teaching philosophy, materials, and evaluations leads me to set the following goals:

- Increase transparency by providing clear objectives for each assignment in every class.
- Continue to develop alternative methods of message delivery, particularly in moving beyond PowerPoint lectures for undergraduates and seminar discussions for graduate students.
- Build collaborative learning opportunities into every class.
- Emphasize knowledge creation to encourage critical thinking, especially in ADPR 5920, and find ways to better motivate students to perform at their highest levels.
- Mentor more graduate students, encouraging them to attend conferences and publish articles from their seminar papers and theses.
- Maintain Weblog and other efforts to connect with professionals and other educators in order to improve public relations education.