

Public Relations for Non-Profit Organizations: Course of Instruction

Course Description

Many worthwhile nonprofit organizations struggle for attention with limited resources for promotion without realizing that an inexpensive public relations program can be one of the most cost effective ways to promote an organization's services or products. Basic public relations activities are relatively simple and require only modest tools such as a common word processor, fax, phone and Internet connection. Learn from a working professional how to craft a simple press release, work with the media, assemble a press kit and coordinate a press event. Development of these skills will enable nonprofit managers to accomplish key goals of increased awareness for fundraising events, volunteer opportunities and organizational programs, products or services.

Instructor Biography

Susan Connell has more than 20 years' experience in marketing communications including her present position as the Director of Technical Communications for Jennings & Associates, an award-winning public relations firm with an international high-tech client base. She believes that non-profit organizations are uniquely positioned to reap cost-effective benefits by implementing some of the promotional tactics used in successful businesses. She has a BA in Communications from UC San Diego, a Certificate in Technical Communication from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is currently completing an MA in Educational Technology at San Diego State University and an Adult Education Credential/Certificate at UC San Diego.

Instructional Goals

1. Learners will be able to describe the purpose of and be able to write a "boilerplate" paragraph that will be consistently used as a description of their organization in press releases, web listings and other directories.
2. Learners will compose a press release about an organizational activity that incorporates an attention-grabbing headline; a lead paragraph that addresses the "who, what, when, where, why and how" questions about the event; is concisely written; and follows conventional standards for grammar and syntax.
3. Learners will develop an outline for a crisis management plan that addresses at least two possible "crisis" situations with an anticipated response for each.
4. Learners will construct a media list — including at least 5 editors, journalists or broadcast producers who might be interested in their organization — that they will ultimately use to send releases and announcements.
5. Content for all projects must honestly reflect the nature of the activity or subject to the satisfaction of the majority of the class, based on the ethical guidelines presented to the class.

Course Content Outline

1. **Additional**
 - a. Define public relations, show samples, discuss recent "news"
 - b. What is not public relations (e.g. paid advertising, etc.)
 - c. How can public relations benefit non-profit organizations and small businesses, costs and realistic results
 - d. Components of a public relations program
 - Press kits with organizational overview, background information, etc
 - Press releases
 - Case studies
 - Speaking opportunities
 - Internet presence
 - Media contacts
 - Crisis plan
 - e. Students begin creating custom press materials for their organization, starting with boilerplate organizational description
2. **Writing Press Releases**
 - a. Key elements of a press release: lead, five "W's", AP Style, consistent boilerplate description
 - b. What makes a press release successful?
 - c. What not to do in a press release? Effective strategies and ethical considerations, PR Code of Ethics.
 - d. Possible topics for press releases, class discussion — What is interesting?
 - e. Students begin creating press release for their organization, to be completed as homework

3. Press Release Review & Crisis Management Introduction

- a. Press release editing and review – AP Style Editing Contest
- b. Beyond the press release: feature articles, case studies, success stories, evergreen news, newsletters,
- c. How to address bad news; when to hire a professional
- d. Strategies for mitigating “bad press”
- e. Ethics review

4. Contacting the Media

- a. Identifying receptive editors, writers and producers
- b. Building a media list
- c. Best methods for contacting the media; differences between print, broadcast and Internet media
- d. Deadlines, follow-up and timeliness
- e. Evaluating results

5. News You Can Use: Planning Events, Promotions and Other Newsworthy Activities

- a. Identifying speaking opportunities
- b. Maximizing effectiveness of organizational events and community activities
- c. Press conferences
- d. Organizational ambassadors and community outreach

Sample Lesson Plan

Standards

- Spelling and grammar should be based on any standard US English dictionary.
- Writing will adhere to Associated Press Style Guidelines as presented in *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* edited by Norm Goldstein and published by Perseus Books Group in 2002. Earlier editions are also acceptable.

Anticipatory Set

- Show the class an enlarged image of a newspaper article about a recent or upcoming charity event and discuss with them how they think the editor developed the story.
- Then show them what a press release generated by the charitable organization about that event might look like.
- Next show them a couple of other media clippings (newspaper, web, magazine, etc.) that also picked up the same press release. Point out similarities and differences in the clippings.
- Most importantly, point out that the only cost associated with getting this type of coverage for their organization would be the cost of an Internet connection (for e-mail), a fax machine or postage. Compare that cost to the price of an advertisement in the same publications.

Presentation

- How does the news media gather news?
- Key elements of a press release: lead, five “W’s”, AP Style, consistent boilerplate description
- What makes a press release successful?
- What not to do in a press release.
- How do you figure out to whom and where to send the press release?
- Use of graphics and photos with press releases.

Guided Practice

- In class, students will write a list of key elements about their individual organization that should be included in a “boilerplate” paragraph. In groups of 3-4, students will seek feedback about the relative importance of those key elements. After prioritizing elements students will individually write a short boilerplate paragraph (<150 words) that could be used as a standard description of their organization in press releases, web listings and other directories.

Independent Practice

- Learners will use a provided MS Word template to create a short (≈300 word) press release about an upcoming organizational event.
- Learners will use the Internet, local newspapers and other sources to start a media list that they will ultimately use to send releases and announcements. The list will include specific reporters, editors, policy makers and web sites that cover their organization’s topics along with personal contact information that can include a street address, phone, fax or e-mail address from at least five different organizations.

Evaluation of Student Performance (in lieu of Final Exam)

Above Average			Average	Below Average		Total Points
Boilerplate Assignment						25 Points
8-10 Points Highlights organizational mission and most interesting accomplishments or features		5-7 Points Describes organization accurately but with little enthusiasm		1-4 Points Does not clearly describe the organization's mission or accomplishments.		
8-10 Points Concise written, less than 150 words; follows Associated Press Style guidelines; no typographical errors; no grammatical errors		5-7 Points Most sentences and paragraphs clearly written; close to the assigned word count; few typographical errors; minor grammatical mistakes		1-4 Points Poorly planned writing; does not demonstrate knowledge of AP Style guidelines; more than 5 typographical errors; significant grammatical errors		
4-5 Points Suitable for use consistently over a long period of time with little modification.		2-3 Points May need to be changed occasionally		1 Point Does not provide a long-term overview; will require frequent changes over time		
Press Release Assignment						50 Points
16-20 Points Intriguing headline with active verb and compelling lead sentence that makes reader want to continue reading.		9-15 Points Descriptive headline with verb and lead sentence that summarizes the story.		1-8 Points Headline lacks verb, is not interesting. Lead sentence does not show benefit to the reader; is poorly written		
12-15 Points Includes 5 W's: Who, what, when, where, why written at a level and tone that will be interesting to the audience		6-11 Points Includes most of 5 W's; clearly explained; describes subject accurately.		1-5 Points Misses more than 2 of the 5 W's; written at a level and tone not appropriate to the audience (e.g. Wrong vocabulary, too wordy, etc.)		
12-15 Points Concise written, 200- 400 words (not counting boilerplate paragraph); follows Associated Press Style guidelines; no typographical errors; no grammatical errors		6-11 Points Most sentences and paragraphs clearly written; close to the assigned word count; few typographical errors; minor grammatical mistakes		1-5 Points Weak, disorganized writing; does not demonstrate knowledge of Associated Press Style guidelines; more than 5 typographical errors; significant grammatical errors		
Media List Assignment						10 Points
4-5 Points Includes full names and titles of 5-10 editors, writers or producers from at least 3 different media outlets who have written about similar topics; include note about similar story they have covered		2-3 Points Includes fewer than 5 complete names and titles or names from few than 3 media outlets; not clear if all of them cover appropriate topics		1 Point Incomplete names, missing titles, have not covered similar topics recently		
4-5 Points Complete address, fax number OR e-mail address for all media contacts — some way to reach them		2-3 Points Missing contact information		1 Point No contact information		
Crisis Management Assignment						10 Points
4-5 Points Outline identifies 2+ possible crisis scenarios.		2-3 Points Outline identifies 1 possible crisis scenario.		1 Point Does not identify a likely crisis scenario.		
4-5 Points Outline suggests at least one possible response to each scenario.		2-3 Points Outline does not suggest reasonable response to one of the scenarios.		1 Point Outline does not suggest reasonable response any of the scenarios.		
Ethics Assessment						5 Points
4-5 Points Review of press release, crisis plan and boilerplate present honest view of the organization or activity described as judged by instructor or majority of class.		1-3 Points Some aspects of assignments appear to be intentionally vague or misleading.		0 Points Any obvious deception in written assignments.		
100 Total Points Possible						