

Employee Relations Course Syllabus

Department of Communication Studies

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Office Hours: We can meet at any mutually-convenient time, f2f or online. You can chat with me through our Moodle interface, through FaceBook (D Rehberg Sedo), via Skype (drehbergsedo), or by telephone. Please make an appointment with me.

Course Overview

A recent [LinkedIn post](#) argued that Internal Communications have the ability to shape organizational culture, and that communicators need to rise up to this important challenge. This course has been designed to: help strengthen your knowledge of a public relations professional's role in facilitating, advising and mediating the development and implementation of effective and manageable internal communication programs; offer both practical and theoretical knowledge of an internal communicator's everyday practices, with particular

"Employees shape the perceptions of organizations as never before. Employees are brand ambassadors. Today, reputations cannot be built or sustained without effectively engaging internal stakeholders. They also have a significant external voice, and demand transparency and authenticity in communication. Markets are forming from these conversations! All of this complexity requires a thoughtful, strategic approach to internal communication".

Promotional copy for the 2011 Institute of Public Relations National Summit on Strategic Communication

emphasis on facilitating effective communication among employees and between line employees and top management; and, provide student-, practitioner- and instructor-generated solutions to improve those practices. This last point is important. I want us to shake things up. I do NOT want to simply teach you how you can do things once you're in a professional position, but rather, I want to teach you how you can do things *better*.

Grunig, Grunig and Dozier's *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations* identify characteristics of an "excellent" communication department within an organization. They

are as follows: (1) public relations must be a management function; (2) the public relations or communication professional has four roles, including manager, senior advisor, technician and media relations; (3) public relations must have an integrated communication function, but be separate from other management functions; and (4) the public relations department must employ a symmetrical model of communication with its publics.

At various times, and some would argue at any given time, "employees" are an organization's most valuable public.

STUDENTS WILL GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT IN THE MANAGEMENT AND PRACTICE OF EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION.

Prerequisites

In order to fully participate and grow personally and professionally in this course, you must have successfully completed PBRL 3014, prior to enrolling in PBRL 4101. You must also have a basic understanding and appreciation for the fundamentals of internal communications as well as communications planning.

Course Goal and Objectives

Calendar Copy: An exploration of the role of public relations in developing and maintaining internal relationships in an organization. The practitioner's functions as facilitator, advisor and mediator in developing and implementing internal communications which are effective and manageable, and which recognize external factors affecting the employer and employees will be examined.

Instructional Objectives

As instructor of this course, I will:

- demonstrate to you how theory allows professionals to think critically and appreciatively about organizations and the communication processes within them, and to make necessary changes;
- inform you about how culture, gender, race, socio-economic and other power hierarchies within organizations influence effective employee communication;
- create awareness of how the external environment affects an organization's employee communication;
- provide an overview of "excellent public relations" with an emphasis on the employee public.

Educational Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to do the following:

- discuss early perspectives on organizations and communication;
- describe an organization's structure and culture and its relevance to employee communication;
- demonstrate how the employee communication professional can facilitate an organization's objectives and goals;
- articulate theories of multi-cultural workplaces;
- identify power issues in the workplaces;
- evaluate and make recommendations for improving employee communications in interpersonal, group and organization-wide settings;
- recognize systematic measurement tools to evaluate employee attitudes and be familiar with interpreting the data;

"This class has taught me about how communications internally is extremely important. Using the many case studies and readings I learned about different ways you can approach different situations to diffuse issues and solve them. I feel good corporate communication begins internally so practicing and going over different things will benefit us in the workplace."

-2012 student

- illustrate creativity and depth in organizational story telling;
- analyze internal and external messages for consistency and compatibility;
- identify ethical considerations pertaining to employees' rights, and organizational responsibilities.

Teaching and Learning Platforms

Moodle and Collaborate

Familiarity with the course management software Moodle is essential. If you've never worked in this platform before, please be certain to explore the [online resources](#) provided by the [MSVU distance education department](#).

Every Thursday, we will gather via Collaborate at noon (AST) for a two hour informal discussion. You are required to participate in these discussions. There are helpful 'how to' instructions on our university website if you are new to Collaborate. **You will also require a microphone and speakers or a headset to participate in the Collaborate discussions.*** If you have any technical problems with Collaborate or Moodle, please contact DLCE at online@msvu.ca.

***This is a requirement.**

- We have a FaceBook page for our class (@Employee Relations Summer 2017). It is currently a public page, but we'll make it private and secret by July 10. (Participation is optional.)
- We also have a course Twitter feed. Please feel free to use this to discuss anything that you think is relevant to the course. You can follow each other at #pbrl4401. Use the same hashtag if you post on Instagram. (Participation is optional.)

Course Material

This course requires you to complete extensive reading, viewing, contemplation and writing.

Various scholarly and industry readings and supplementary digital material (including websites, videos and podcasts) will be required, and will be available through our Moodle web page. Some

This class was most definitely valuable for the Public Relations degree. ... (We) learned how important communication is for companies, both internally and externally. Learning through case studies and class readings helped us relate concepts to real-life situations. Even though this class flew by, I can say that I'm leaving thinking differently. ... I work in a communications department, however, we still never know what's going on in the industry and when meetings are taking place, when events are happening, etc. This is affecting the company's internal environment, which leads to my department not being able to let publics know what's going on in the industry, so that also influences the external environment.

Communication seems like such an easy tool but it's crazy to see how many companies lack it.

-2012 student

readings may not be available on the Moodle page. You will need to find them yourself through our [MSVU Library web page](#). The required material is indicated below and in each of the module outlines, which are listed on

our Moodle page beginning July 3.

The Way the Course Works

- This course is a culmination of most previous public relations courses (and some other university courses) you have taken to date. The context for this knowledge is employee communication. We will revisit theories and practical applications of interpersonal, intercultural, small group, organizational, computer-mediated, social media and mass communication.
- I understand that the compressed time for summer courses makes reading and class activities outside of very difficult. Please plan your life accordingly; schedule 12 hours per week for this class.
- Discussion of course material will be led by students, and guided by me.

Primary & Secondary Responses

- This is a [discussion format](#) that encourages you to fully engage with the course material through synchronous and asynchronous discussion.
- Each week will have at least five Primary Responders and five Secondary Responders. That means that you can count on being a Primary Responder once during the term, and a Secondary Responder once during the term. If you are not assigned as a Primary or as a Secondary Responder during the Module, your role is to observe and participate in the discussion at will. Keep in mind that your participation will enrich the conversation and help you prepare for the quizzes.
- As a **Primary Responder**, you will start the discussion on the FIRST day of each week by 9:00 a.m. You are expected to think analytically, creatively, and critically about the module's topic, and the listening, reading, viewing material in the context of your daily personal and work lives. PLEASE LOOK AT THE [ONLINE DISCUSSION RUBRIC](#) WE WILL USE TO SHAPE YOUR POSTS.
 - **Primary Responders** post at least TWO questions or discussion prompters in two separate discussion boards on Moodle to begin the discussions. These are questions that you want the Secondary Responders to respond to. You are responsible for then carrying on the discussion throughout the week.
 - **Secondary Responders** will do their own critical thinking about the course material, and respond to at least two different questions posed by two different Primary Responders no later than 24 hours after the questions have been posted. You, too, help in carrying on the discussion.
- Collaborate meetings will be divided between a short lecture, large group discussion, case study review and activity. Some classes will feature a guest speaker, film, media clip(s), or other elements as deemed appropriate by me (often in consultation with the class). The second half of the Collaborate meeting times will be led by Secondary Responders.

- **Secondary Responders will consider the week's contents**, “as well as questions and ideas from the primary Responders, to develop a written outline of at least [three] key points or questions that they use to lead or co-lead their [30] minute small-group discussions” (Harvey, 2017) during our Collaborate sessions. ***These points will be submitted to me after our Collaborate session.***
- I will bring the group back from breakout discussions and ask one student from each group who is not a Primary or Secondary Responder to share highlights from the small group discussions. This will ensure that my learning objectives for you have been addressed.
- The contributions made on Moodle and during our Collaborate sessions will be both peer and teacher evaluated. *Each student will be asked once throughout the term to provide me with an evaluation of First and Secondary Responders using the [Online Discussion Rubric](#) designed by Joan Vandervelde. (The student evaluators will be anonymous.) Send via email to me your evaluations of each primary and secondary responder within 24 hours of the module ending. I will also use this rubric to provide my own feedback and a mark. No marks will be given for this task, but you will receive good karma. In addition, it's a good learning opportunity for you. Please note: This rubric is used with permission.*
 - You will need to attend our Collaborate sessions and actually be present to participate fully.
 - Responder lists will be posted on Moodle by July 6; changes can be negotiated amongst yourselves, but must be approved by me by July 9.
- Learning teams will be arranged by the second class. These groups will work on concept mapping throughout the term, and create a final concept map as a final project.
 - The Concept Map is a shared final project
 - It is a work in progress, and will help you to begin articulating links between the very complex process of understanding and critiquing employee/internal communication, and your your role in it. The map is meant to represent the central concepts and/or themes that emerge for you and your team mates in your discussions, readings, viewings and listenings, and the relationships you see among these themes and concepts. At the centre, you will begin with the contemplation of “What is Effective Employee Communication?” You will present this map to the class at the end of the term, and you are encouraged to be creative. Feel free to use ANY medium you've been exposed to or learned about during class or in any class. Submit the map in class or use the space provided on our Moodle page. NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS will be accepted. *Please note that five percent of this mark is based on team members' peer evaluations; another five percent is based on the scores that your classmates appoint to your map and presentation. The remaining 10 percent is my own evaluation of your teams' work.
- To gauge your interaction and learning objective success, there will be two quizzes throughout the term. I will post a quiz to our Moodle page. You will have 24-hour access to the quiz, but only one hour to complete it. The quizzes will cover the course material

and discussions, and will be a combination of multiple choice, matching, and short answer questions.

Assignments and Evaluation

These assignments are designed to measure your achievement in three domains: knowledge, attitudes and skills. Negotiable until July 7.

	Due Date (All tasks are due at 11:55 p.m. on the date listed, unless otherwise noted.)	Value
Course Material Responses	Throughout the term. Details noted below. No late discussions will be evaluated (but you're free to continue).	Primary Responses 20% Secondary Responses 20%
Quizzes	Two throughout the term. Dates: July 27; August 17 (last quiz is cumulative) Note that these are not scheduled during our Collaborate sessions. No late quizzes will be accepted.	15% for #1 and 25% for #2
Concept Maps	No late assignments accepted.	20%*

**Please note that five percent of this mark is based on team members' peer evaluations; another five percent is based on the scores that your classmates appoint to your map and presentation. The remaining 10 percent is my own evaluation of your teams' work.

WEEKLY SYNOPSIS

(Subject to change by the professor and/or the class after discussion, if necessary.)

<p>Introductions Week One July 6-12</p>	<p>Introductions: You, me, the course</p> <p>Topics for Discussion: Valuing theory, thinking critically about organizations and the communication processes within; Defining employee communications and thinking about why internal communication is important; Who IS an effective employee? What IS effective employee communication?</p> <p>Educational objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss early perspectives on organizations and communication; • describe an organization's structure and culture and its relevance to employee communication; • demonstrate how the employee communication professional can facilitate an organization's objectives and goals. <p><i>Learning tasks</i></p>
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Attend Collaborate Session Thursday, July 11 11am-1pm**Read:**

Fitzsimmons, S., & Stamper, C. (2014). How societal culture influences friction in the employee-organization relationship. *Human Resource Management Review*, 24(1), 80–94.

Gratton, L. (2010). The Future of Work. [Article]. *Business Strategy Review*, 21(3), 16-23.

Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., & Dozier, D. M. (2002). *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum. [Questions used for the study. Four pages that are on our Moodle page.]

[Haden, J. \(n/d\). 8 Qualities of remarkable employees. Inc.](#)

[McCord, P. \(January 2014\). How Netflix Reinvented HR. Harvard Business Review. \(if you cannot link, cut and paste this address: <https://hbr.org/2014/01/how-netflix-reinvented-hr>\)](#)

Ruck, K., & Welch, M. (2012). Valuing internal communication; management and employee perspectives. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 294–302.

Watch:

[TedTalks \(Producer\). \(2013, March 5, 2014\) Yves Morieux: As work gets more complex, 6 rules to simplify. \(approx. 12 min.\)](#)

On Young and Diverse Workers, Leaders and Bull#\$(%

Week 2

July 13-19

Topics for Discussion:

Workplace demographics; socio-cultural theories and practicalities of contemporary North American workplaces; leadership imperatives; authenticity, ethics, privacy and policy in the workplace

Educational Objectives:

- articulate theories of multi-cultural workplaces;
- identify power issues in the workplaces;
- identify ethical considerations pertaining to employees' rights, and organizational responsibilities.

Learning tasks**Attend Collaborate Session** Thursday, July 13 11am-1pm**Read:**

Berger, B. K. (2005). Power over, power with, and power to relations: Critical reflections on public relations, the dominant coalition, and

activism. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(1), 5-28.

Downey, S. N., Werff, L., Thomas, K. M., & Plaut, V. C. (2015). The role of diversity practices and inclusion in promoting trust and employee engagement. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45(1), 35–44.

Friedl, J. and Vercic, A. (2013) Media preferences of digital natives' internal communication: A pilot study. *Public Relations Review*, V37, 84-86.

Men, L. R. (2014). Why Leadership Matters to Internal Communication: Linking Transformational Leadership, Symmetrical Communication, and Employee Outcomes. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(3), 256–279.

Sutton, B. (2012, March 22). *Hollow visions, bullshit, lies and leadership vs. management*. Bob Sutton: Work Matters.

Taylor, C. (1995). Building a Business Case for Diversity. [Article]. *Canadian Business Review*, 22(1), 12.

Tobak, S. (2012, January 16). *7 modern workplace myths*. CBS Money Watch.

Watch:

Grungig PR Masterclass: Insight into diversity and excellence; first 40 minutes and ending for Q & A

**Focusing on
“How” & Doing it
Well**

Week 3

July 20-26

Topics for Discussion:

Communicating *Strategically*; choosing and creating the proper tools and channels; measuring effective communication

Educational Objectives:

- evaluate and make recommendations for improving employee communications in interpersonal, group and organization-wide settings;
- recognize systematic measurement tools to evaluate employee attitudes and be familiar with interpreting the data.

Learning tasks

Attend Collaborate Session Thursday, July 20 11am-1pm

Read:

Cardon, PW and B. Marshall. (2015). “The Hype and Reality of Social Media Use for Work Collaboration and Team Communication.” *International Journal of Business Communication* 52 (3): 273–93.

Breakenridge, D. (2012). Social media and public relations eight new practices for the PR professional. [Chapter 2, Practice #2 The internal collaboration generator.]

Collins, K. (nd) Measuring the effectiveness of employee communication. Retrieved from <http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/measuring-effectiveness-employee-communications/>

Holtz, pp. 54-65 *Communications Planning (on Moodle)*

Social media from the inside out. (2010). *Communication World*, 27(5), 36-39.

Watch

Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers. (2014). *The Strategic Importance of Internal Communications and Employee Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VHgM9VVoU>

Additional Activity: Use search terms “internal communication” and/or “employee engagement”. Choose five videos to watch. Using the concept of 3 – 2 –1, note 3 consistencies among the video messages; 2 take aways for your future work; and 1 personal critique. Note your observations in the appropriate Moodle forum.

Creativity and Organizational Storytelling

Week 4

July 27-Aug 2

Topics for Discussion: storytelling as a diagnostic tool and culture creator; role of creativity; storytelling pragmatics and techniques

Educational objectives:

- illustrate creativity and depth in organizational story telling;
- analyze internal and external messages for consistency and compatibility.

Learning tasks

Attend Collaborate Session Thursday, July 27 11am-1pm

Read:

Feldman, S. P. (1990). Stories as Cultural Creativity: On the Relation Between Symbolism and Politics in Organizational Change. *Human Relations*, 43(9), 809-828.

Holtz, pp. 220-244 *Enhancing Employee-to-Employee Communication*

Mishra, K., Boynton, L., & Mishra, A. (2014). Driving Employee Engagement. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 51(2), 183–202.

	<p>Stevenson, D. (2004). Make your Internal Communications Memorable with Strategic Storytelling. <i>CW Online - CW Bulletin, July</i>. (Available on our Moodle page.)</p> <p><i>Watch:</i> Social Storytelling is the New Internal Communications (approx. 1 hour)</p>
<p>Communicating the good, the bad, and the ugly Week 5 Aug 3-9</p>	<p>Topics for Discussion: ethical treatment of employees; consistent communication during normal and volatile situations</p> <p>Educational objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyze internal and external messages for consistency and compatibility; identify ethical considerations pertaining to employees' rights, and organizational responsibilities. <p><i>Learning tasks</i></p> <p>Attend Collaborate Session Thursday, August 3 11am-1pm</p> <p><i>Read:</i> Coombs, W. T. (2014, September 23). Crisis Management and Communications (Updated September 2014). (Include accompanying graphics.)</p> <p><i>Holtz, pp. 126-178 Ongoing Communication; Communicating Bad News; Communicating Change</i></p> <p><i>Watch:</i> Diana Dosik: Why we need to treat our employees as thoughtfully as our customers (approx. 10 min.)</p> <p>What role does internal communication play in during a crisis? (approx. 3 min.)</p>
<p>~Bringing it all Together~</p>	
<p>Week 6/7 August 10-17</p>	<p>Attend Collaborate Session Thursday, August 10 11am-1pm Presentation and discussions of Concept Maps.</p> <p>Final Cumulative Quiz on August 17 (No Collaborate Session)</p>

PBRL 4101 (18) Employee Relations

Department and University Policies

Department writing requirement policy

Correct use of language is one of the criteria included in the evaluation of all written assignments. Basic writing competency is required to pass this course. The obligation to meet the minimal standard lies with the student. If a faculty member determines that a student's basic writing competency falls below the minimum standard for the course, the student will fail the course.

Statement on Plagiarism and Cheating

I expect you to be honest and responsible in fulfilling the course requirements and objectives. DISCIPLINARY ACTION WILL BE TAKEN if you cheat. You will fail the assignment, and you may fail the course. Note that plagiarism is presenting someone else's words or ideas obtained from any source, including the internet, as though they were one's own. Other, specific offences include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Using copied material without enclosing that material in quotation marks and/or without appropriately acknowledging its source;
- Paraphrasing or summarizing the original wording too closely;
- Omitting acknowledgment of the source of paraphrases and summaries;
- Submitting work that has been written in full or in part by someone else;
- Submitting work you have submitted for credit in another course without acknowledging its source to me prior to submitting the assignment.

As required by the University, I am including the following for your information: University regulations on Plagiarism and Cheating will be strictly enforced. These regulations are posted on boards and are found in the University Calendar and on the website at www.msvu.ca on the "Current Student" page under "Academic Offences".

Statement on Communication Technologies

While I encourage you to share your passion and interests in new gadgets and software, I ask that while we are participating in our Collaborate sessions you give full, deserved attention to me and to your peers. Turn off all other devices and platforms, and please stay focused on the learning software. You deserve it, your peers deserve it, and I deserve it.

Statement on the Course Syllabus

The syllabus is a guide for our class structure. While it is a collaborative document drafted by me and negotiated by you, it is our course "memorandum of understanding" after May 11.

Statement on Grading/Marking

Graded assignments should be discussed one on one between you and me. Please make an appointment. Grading concerns should be addressed within two days after the assignment is returned.

Statement on Course Policy (re: missed deadlines or assignments)

I will not accept late assignments or consider late posts. If you are experiencing any kind of personal issue that prohibits you from completing tasks by the due date, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to create a mutually-desirable compromise. I will be able to do little to help you if you wait until the due date or the final weeks of the term. In fact, I will not consider late assignments or posts unless you have discussed your issues with me at least 48 hours prior to the deadline.

Statement for students with disabilities

Students who have a disability and who require academic accommodations must register with Accessibility Services as early as possible in order to receive accommodations

(<http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/student-services/office-of-student-experience/>).

The University regulations on plagiarism and cheating and other academic offenses will be strictly enforced. You will fail the assignment, and perhaps the course, if you cheat. These regulations including applicable procedures and penalties are detailed in the University Calendar and are posted on the website at www.msvu.ca on the Current Student's Page, under Academic Offenses.

Statement on teaching and learning technologies

The University wishes us to use our MSVU e-mail addresses for electronic communications. Please do so. Communication between students and professor may also happen in and through Moodle, our FaceBook page and our Twitter feed.

Statement on accommodation of religious observances

Requests for accommodation of specific religious or spiritual observance must be presented in writing to me within the first two weeks of class.

Policy Against Sexual Assault

Mount Saint Vincent University has no tolerance for sexual assault. The Mount is committed to providing and maintaining a safe environment that promotes the dignity and well-being of the University community. The University has a strong tradition of social responsibility.

Statement on research ethics review

Students who conduct research involving human participants must have their research reviewed in accordance with the MSVU Policies and Procedures of *Ethics Review of Research Involving Humans* before starting the research. This includes interviewing people for your final project.