



Communication Studies Department

COM 3090 - Introduction to Public Relations

3 units

Spring 2026

Meeting days/times: Bi-weekly via Zoom

Meeting location: Independent Study

Final Exam: TBD

INFORMATION	SPECIFICS FOR THE COURSE
Instructor title and name:	Adjunct Professor, Susana Franco
Phone:	(951) 500-9516
Email:	sfranco@pointloma.edu
Office location and hours:	By Appointment - Via Zoom

PLNU Mission

To Teach ~ To Shape ~ To Send

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service is an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we strive to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This independent study course is an introduction to the theory and practice of public relations. Topics include public relations roles, research, media relations, digital and social media, ethics, crisis communication, and an introduction to public relations cases and campaigns. The course explores public relations practice in business, educational, governmental, and nonprofit organizational settings. The course mirrors the learning objectives and rigor of the traditional Intro to Public Relations course, adapted for an independent, writing-based format.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, the student will be able to:

- Understand key theories that underlie the practice of public relations.
- Understand and apply the standard processes of public relations practice.
- Analyze public relations case studies using foundational PR concepts.
- Understand and articulate the role of values and ethics in public relations.
- Apply PR principles to a personal self-brand through research and strategic reflection.

COURSE TEXTBOOK:

Guth, D. W., & Marsh, C. (2016). *Public relations: A values-driven approach* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. ***NOTE: this is only available in ebook (used older editions will also be accepted)***

COURSE FORMAT:

This course is conducted as an independent study and is writing-intensive. The student is responsible for completing all assigned readings, written summaries, case studies, exams, and the final project.

Bi-weekly Zoom Check-Ins: The student will meet with the instructor via Zoom **every two weeks** for a scheduled check-in (approximately 30–45 minutes). These meetings are intended to review progress, discuss course concepts, clarify expectations, and provide feedback on upcoming assignments. The student is responsible for scheduling and attending these meetings and should come prepared with questions or updates on their work.

Independent study courses require strong self-direction, time management, and consistent communication.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS:

Written Learning Summaries (Weekly)

Instead of quizzes, the student will submit a **1–2 page written summary** for each module explaining:

- Key concepts learned from the readings
- How those concepts apply to real-world public relations practice

Case Studies (3 Total)

The student will complete three in-depth written case study analyses (3–4 pages each), applying course concepts, research, ethics, and strategy.

Self-Brand Final Project

The final project is a Self-Brand Presentation, adapted from the traditional course.

Part One – Research: Interview three people (a family member, a friend, and someone who does not know you) about how they perceive you.

Part Two – Strategy: Analyze the feedback and define how you want to brand yourself moving forward.

Part Three – Presentation: Create and submit a 4–6 minute recorded presentation with visual aids that includes:

- Your current brand
- Three core values or talents
- A personal mission statement
- At least one future goal

FINAL EXAM:

Description: The Final Exam will be on Canvas with Honorlock.

Style Standard: The exams will each consist of 50 multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, matching questions, and short essays (which will be graded for: insight, analysis, clear connections to course content, and a sophisticated writing style.)

SELF-BRAND PRESENTATION EXPLAINED

PART ONE: You must interview three people about how they see you. Who do they think you are? Write down notes from what they tell you for your PR "research" before you start to brand yourself.

These three people must include:

1. A family member.
2. A friend.
3. Someone who does not know you.

PART TWO: Based on these observations, decide how you want to “brand” yourself as a human being. Does anything need to change? Do you like how others see you? Create a short presentation (4-6 minutes) to describe how you want to “brand” yourself moving forward in the future.

PART THREE: Present your “brand” to the class via recorded video. Make sure you include the following in the presentation:

1. Your current “brand” (including your feedback from interviews and what your media consumption says about your tastes/who you are).

2. Three values you hold and/or talents you can use
3. A “mission statement” for who you are as a person/ who you want to be
4. At least one goal for your future

FORMATTING DETAILS: To create and present your brand you can use Google Slides, PowerPoint, or an online platform like Prezi. Please avoid Keynote. Get as creative with it as you want. Remember, you only have a few minutes to share with us, so keep it simple.

PARTICIPATION:

This is a hands-on, student-centered course. Therefore, you will be graded on your participation. Those who are energetic, contributory, and consistent with attendance will receive a high participation grade. As contribution to and involvement with the class goes down, so will the grade. Contributions to our roundtable discussions, guest speaker Q & A sessions, and group projects will be considered when calculating the participation grade.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

	Points Possible Your Score	
Written Learning Summaries (7)	5 points each	20%
Case Studies (3)	10 points each	30%
Participation & Instructor Check-Ins	10 points	5%
Self-Branding Presentation	100 points	25%
Final Exam/Reflection	50 points	20%
Total Points		100%

GRADING SCALE:

Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent
A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69

B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-59

GRADING STANDARDS:

“A’s”... are awarded for work that is **highly exceptional, shows insight and analysis in** submittals and class discussion and **goes beyond all minimal requirements**

“B’s”...are awarded for work that is above average and **goes beyond minimal requirements.**

“C’s”...are awarded for work that meets basic standards and requirements.

“D’s”.....are awarded for below average work that usually lacks minimal requirements.

“F’s”.....are awarded for work that clearly does not meet minimal standards, or is not completed.

University Notifications

SUPPORT:

I am committed to helping every student attain their best possible education. I AM HERE TO HELP! Please do not hesitate to ask questions, or schedule a Zoom office hours appointment. I am also happy to provide support and feedback on assignments before they are turned in or presented. If you have any particular needs or concerns that would be helpful for me to be aware of, please do let me know.

Electronic Devices:

The use of cell phones is prohibited in class. Laptops/tablets may be used for note taking or other class-related activities. If any of these devices becomes a distraction the student will be asked to put them away.

Reading Policy:

You are expected to read the designated chapters in the text **before** coming to class on the day the readings are due. Coming to class is **not** a substitute for reading the text, nor is reading the text a substitute for attending class. Class time will be used to build on your reading, not to review it as not all of the material from the book will be covered in class. Come to each class prepared to ask questions you have about the reading, to explore confusing aspects of the material, and to provide examples and illustrations of the theories and concepts covered in the text.

Professionalism:

Please be respectful of your peers and instructor at all times and recognize that both rhetorical and relational sensitivity are important in a course environment (as well as at work).

Final Examination Policy:

Successful completion of this class requires taking the final examination on its scheduled day. The final examination schedule is posted on the [Traditional Undergraduate Records: Final Exam Schedules](#) site. If you find yourself scheduled for three (3) or more final examinations on the same day, you are authorized to contact each professor to arrange a different time for one of those exams. However, unless you have three (3) or more exams on the same day, no requests for alternative final examinations will be granted.

Incompletes and Late Assignments:

All assignments are to be submitted/turned in by the beginning of the class session when they are due—including assignments posted in Canvas. Incompletes will only be assigned in extremely unusual circumstances.

Spiritual Care:

Please be aware PLNU strives to be a place where you grow as whole persons. To this end, we provide resources for our students to encounter God and grow in their Christian faith.

If you have questions, a desire to meet with the chaplain or have prayer requests you can contact your professor or the [Office of Spiritual Life and Formation](#).

State Authorization:

State authorization is a formal determination by a state that Point Loma Nazarene University is approved to conduct activities regulated by that state. In certain states outside California, Point Loma Nazarene University is not authorized to enroll online (distance education) students. If a student moves to another state after admission to the program and/or enrollment in an online course, continuation within the program and/or course will depend on whether Point Loma Nazarene University is authorized to offer distance education courses in that state. It is the student's responsibility to notify the institution of any change in his or her physical location. Refer to the map on [State Authorization](#) to view which states allow online (distance education) outside of California.

PLNU Copyright Policy:

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.]

PLNU Recording Notification:

In order to enhance the learning experience, please be advised that this course may be recorded by the professor for educational purposes, and access to these recordings will be limited to enrolled students and authorized personnel.

Note that all recordings are subject to copyright protection. Any unauthorized distribution or publication of these recordings without written approval from the University (refer to the Dean) is strictly prohibited.

PLNU Academic Honesty Policy:

Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination, or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course. For all student appeals, faculty and students should follow the procedures outlined in the University Catalog. See [Academic Policies](#) for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy:

You are allowed to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini Pro 1.5, GrammarlyGo, Perplexity, etc) to generate ideas, but you are not allowed to use AI tools to generate content (text, video, audio, images) that will end up in any work submitted to be graded for this course. If you have any doubts about using AI, please gain permission from the instructor. Any work that utilizes AI-based tools must be clearly identified as such, including the specific tool(s) used. Please use the following sources to guide your citations when using AI.

MLA Style Center: Citing Generative AI
APA Style: How to Cite ChatGPT
Chicago Manual of Style: Citing Content Developed or Generated by AI

PLNU Academic Accommodations Policy:

PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and activities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in the Bond Academic Center (EAC@pointloma.edu or 619-849-2486). Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will work with the student to create an Accommodation Plan (AP) that outlines allowed accommodations. The EAC makes accommodations available to professors at the student's request.

PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their AP in that particular course. Accommodations are not retroactive so clarifying with the professor at the outset is one of the best ways to promote positive academic outcomes.

Students who need accommodations for a disability should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to assure appropriate accommodations can be provided. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC. Students cannot assume that because they had accommodations in the past, their eligibility at PLNU is automatic. All determinations at PLNU must go through the EAC process. This is to protect the privacy of students with disabilities who may not want to disclose this information and are not asking for any special accommodations.

Language and Belonging:

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe and hospitable learning environment for all students. As Christian scholars we are keenly aware of the power of language and believe in treating others with dignity. As such, it is important that our language be equitable, inclusive, and prejudice free. Inclusive/Bias-free language is the standard outlined by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and it is the expected norm in university-level work. Good writing and speaking do not use unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about personal qualities such as age, disability, economic class, ethnicity, marital status, parentage, political or religious beliefs, race, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Inclusive language also avoids using stereotypes or terminology that demeans persons or groups based on age, disability, class, ethnicity, gender, race, language, or national origin. Respectful use of language is particularly important when referring to those outside of the religious and lifestyle commitments of those in the PLNU community. By working toward precision and clarity of language, we mark ourselves as serious and respectful scholars, and we model the Christ-like quality of hospitality.

If you (or someone you know) have experienced a bias incident regarding language, you can find more information on reporting and resources at www.pointloma.edu/bias.

Sexual Misconduct and Discrimination:

In support of a safe learning environment, if you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual discrimination or misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that accommodations and resources are available through the Title IX Office at pointloma.edu/Title-IX. Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, faculty and staff are required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office.

If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Counseling Services at counselingservices@pointloma.edu or find a list of campus pastors at pointloma.edu/title-ix.

If you (or someone you know) have experienced other forms of discrimination or bias, you can find more information on reporting and resources at www.pointloma.edu/bias

PLNU Attendance and Participation Policy:

Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions, the faculty member will issue a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university withdrawal date or, after that date, receive an “F” grade.

Content Warning:

I acknowledge that each of you comes to PLNU with your own unique life experiences. This contributes to the way you perceive various types of information. In [class name], all of the class content, including that which may be intellectually or emotionally challenging, has been intentionally curated to achieve the learning goals for this course. The decision to include such material is not taken lightly. These topics include [list topics]. If you encounter a topic that is intellectually challenging for you, it can manifest in feelings of discomfort and upset. In response, I encourage you to come talk to me or your friends or family about it. Class topics are discussed for the sole purpose of expanding your intellectual engagement in the area of [subject/major], and I will support you throughout your learning in this course.

Trigger Warning:

I acknowledge that each of you comes to PLNU with your own unique life experiences. This contributes to the way you perceive several types of information. In [class name],

we will cover a variety of topics, some of which you may find triggering. These topics include [list topics]. Each time this topic appears in a reading or unit, it is marked on the syllabus. The experience of being triggered versus intellectually challenged are different. The main difference is that an individual must have experienced trauma to experience being triggered, whereas an intellectual challenge has nothing to do with trauma. If you are a trauma survivor and encounter a topic in this class that is triggering for you, you may feel overwhelmed or panicked and find it difficult to concentrate. In response, I encourage you to take the necessary steps for your emotional safety. This may include leaving class while the topic is discussed or talking to a therapist at the Counseling Center. Should you choose to sit out on discussion of a certain topic, know that you are still responsible for the material; but we can discuss if there are other methods for accessing that material, and for assessing your learning on that material. Class topics are discussed for the sole purpose of expanding your intellectual engagement in the area of [subject/major], and I will support you throughout your learning in this course.

Loma Writing Center:

The Loma Writing Center exists to help all members of the PLNU community cultivate transferable writing skills to engage their academic, professional, personal, and spiritual communities. We work toward this goal by conducting one-on-one consultation sessions, supporting writing education across the PLNU community, and participating in ongoing writing center research.

Getting feedback from the Loma Writing Center while you're in the process of working on an assignment is a great way to improve the quality of your writing and develop as a writer. You are encouraged to talk with a trained writing consultant about getting started on an assignment, organizing your ideas, finding and citing sources, revising, editing for grammar and polishing final drafts, and more. For information about how to make in-person or online appointments, see [Loma Writing Center webpage](#) or visit the Loma Writer Center on the first floor of the Ryan Library, room 221.

- Appointment Calendar: <https://plnu.mywconline.com/>
- Website: <https://www.pointloma.edu/centers-institutes/loma-writing-center>

Email: writingcenter@pointloma.edu

Lomabooks Instructions for Students:

*This course is part of our course material delivery program, **LomaBooks**. The bookstore will provide each student with a convenient package containing all required physical materials; all digitally delivered materials will be integrated into Canvas.*

You should have received an email from the bookstore confirming the list of materials that will be provided for each of your courses and asking you to select how you would like to receive any printed components (in-store pick up or home delivery). If you have not done so already, please confirm your fulfillment preference so the bookstore can prepare your materials.

*For more information about **LomaBooks**, please go: [HERE](#)*

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR:

8-Week Course Calendar (Independent Study)

Week 1 (Jan 12–18, 2026): Foundations of Public Relations

Read: Chapters 1–2

Due: Written Learning Summary #1

Zoom Check-In: Week of Jan 12

Week 2 (Jan 19–25, 2026): History, Publics, and Ethics

Read: Chapters 3–6

Due: Written Learning Summary #2

Week 3 (Jan 26–Feb 1, 2026): Research, Planning, and Communication

Read: Chapters 7–9

Due: Written Learning Summary #3

Due: Case Study #1

Zoom Check-In: Week of Jan 26

Week 4 (Feb 2–8, 2026): Messaging & Multimedia Development

Read: Chapters 10–11

Due: Written Learning Summary #4

Week 5 (Feb 9–15, 2026): Digital PR & Crisis Communication

Read: Chapters 12–13

Due: Written Learning Summary #5

Due: Case Study #2

Zoom Check-In: Week of Feb 9

Week 6 (Feb 16–22, 2026): Culture, Law, and PR Strategy

Read: Chapters 14–15

Due: Written Learning Summary #6

Week 7 (Feb 23–Mar 1, 2026): The Future of Public Relations

Read: Chapter 16

Due: Written Learning Summary #7

Due: Case Study #3

Zoom Check-In: Week of Feb 23

Week 8 (Mar 2–8, 2026): Final Assessment

Due: Self-Brand Presentation

Due: Final Exam/Reflection (Chapters 1–16)