BU347: Public Relations (Fall 2021)
Midterm Exam

For your midterm exam, you may choose to respond to one (1) of the essay options below. Regardless of your choice, your midterm essay should be five (5) to seven (7) double-spaced pages (excluding works cited) and should include at least two (2) scholarly references (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles found using the Caldwell University library databases). **Your essay should be submitted via Blackboard or email no later than 11:59pm ET on 11/3/21.**

Essay Option 1

The murder of George Floyd shocked much of America—and, importantly, shocked much of America into long-overdue action addressing race-related violence and discrimination. Colleges and universities are among the institutions that received considerable attention in this regard.

As the #BlackLivesMatter movement unfolded across the United States, several formal and informal student groups took to Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to share minority student experiences via "Black at…" accounts (e.g., @BlackAtVillanovaUniversity). **For your midterm essay, you will analyze public relations themes in the "Black at…" movement from the perspective of its key audiences: Students and school administration.**

Select one (1) to two (2) colleges or universities with "Black at…" accounts or movements. Evaluate the content shared by students in light of key messages, spokespeople, and target audiences. Then, research the institution's reaction and response to the "Black at…" accounts (Note: These responses can be found by searching university websites, press releases, and news coverage).

To help guide your analysis, focus on addressing the following core questions in your essay:

- How would you summarize the "Black at…" movement at the school(s) you evaluated for someone unfamiliar with the situation? Why do you think the majority of these movements began with social media rather than official complaints to school administration?
- What were the key messages of the "Black at…" movement at the schools you evaluated? Did they differ as articulated by "Black at…" accounts versus the school administrators?
- Based on the three (3) core components of our definition of PR—which you should briefly explain in your essay—where did the university you analyzed succeed or fail? Were there errors related to strategy, the communications process, and/or identifying audiences and building mutually beneficial relationships? Justify your claims.

You should also attempt to address at least one of the questions below:

- What could the universities you analyzed have done better or differently?
- Would action have been possible without the George Floyd murder and the #BlackLivesMatter movement? Why?

- At the time this exam was written, Caldwell University lacked a central "Black at…" account like those observed elsewhere. Based on your own opinions, explain why. Do you think a "Black at Caldwell" account should exist?

Essay Option 2

In addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, public relations successes and failures have contributed greatly to what's worked…and what hasn't. **For your midterm essay, you will analyze how well an organization of your choosing addressed communicated its messaging around COVID-19.**

Pick an organization that played a key role shaping public awareness about COVID-19. For the purposes of this assignment, it is acceptable to pick *any* organization, including organizations that may have spread what public health experts may consider "controversial," "inaccurate," or "sensational" information.

Your organization could be:

- A government entity in the U.S. or abroad (such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the U.S. Departments of Health & Human Services, the New Jersey State Department of Health, the United Kingdom's National Health Service, the World Health Organization, etc.).
- A non-profit (such as the American Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, etc.).
- An advocacy group or lobbying entity (including the American Medical Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, etc.).
- A prominent national business (including hospitals, health systems, etc.).
- Any formal organization with a particularly important message related to COVID-19 (including, but not limited to, organizations that may have denied the existence of COVID-19, questioned the safety of COVID-19 treatments/vaccines, and/or questioned certain preventive practices—such as social distancing or mask mandates).

Keep in mind that your selection need in no way speak to your own personal beliefs about COVID-19. The focus of this assignment is on how well *others* communicated—regardless of what you (or I) may "believe."

Identify this organization's top three (3) messages and top three (3) audiences. Based on the three (3) core components of our definition of PR—which you should briefly explain in your essay—did the organization succeed or fail in communicating its messages? Were there key successes or failures it experienced related to strategy, the communications process, and/or identifying audiences and building mutually beneficial relationships? Justify your claims.

To help guide your analysis, focus on addressing the following core questions in your essay:

- How would you summarize the organization's position? How did it connect with its key audiences?
- What were the key messages of the organization? Did they differ or change when they were taken up by audiences/the general public?
- What does research tell us about how organizations can fail or succeed when communicating about public health? How might health communication differ from other types of communication (such as communicating about a business or commercial product, for example)?

You should also attempt to address at least one of the questions below:

- Did other groups attempt to counter your organization's messaging? Who was more successful and why?
- What are your organization's greatest challenges and opportunities moving forward? Justify your claim.