**Format/Structure Suggestions for the Written Case Study**

**SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FORMAT/STRUCTURE**

**Note:** This format is optional. Students should use formats that fit best with their individual topics and styles.

**Executive Summary**

This section is a single paragraph that summarizes the essence of the document. It should outline the purpose of the case study, then summarize concisely the client’s communications problem or opportunity, the communications strategy, the program the client used to solve the problem, the results, and a brief look at the student’s assessment of the case study.

This summary on its own should give the reader a high-level preview of everything that follows. It is not an introduction to the paper; it is a summary of it.

**Background**

This section is a concise summary of any background or historical perspective on the client organization that the reader needs to understand for the rest of the proposal to make sense. It may include information such as the following; it will most likely not include all of the following. Cite sources, please. And consider including graphics, charts, or illustrations, either as part of the text--they will not count toward your page limit—or as appendices.

* + - What is the client’s overall mission?
    - What is the organization’s history relevant to the case?
    - What is the time period of this case study?
    - What are the client’s key, relevant organizational goals during this period?
    - What are important challenges the client faced at the beginning of the case?
    - Were there organizational politics or other issues that were relevant to the case?

**The Communications Problem or Opportunity**

This section should lay out the key communications problem or opportunity the client faced at the beginning of this case. Why was it a problem for the client? How big a problem was it? Or why was it an opportunity for the client? How big an opportunity was it? What would happen if the client did not solve the problem, or make the most of the opportunity?

Please keep this section concise and focused on a problem or opportunity the client used strategic communications to solve.

**Situation Analysis**

This section is the foundation from which the case builds. It lays out all the evidence relevant to the reader’s understanding of the case, citing sources. It may include answers to any or all of the questions listed below. It should present *only* information, however, that is specifically relevant to this case, in an order that expresses your thinking clearly, logically, and compellingly.

Consider including graphics, charts, or illustrations. If they appear in the text, they will not count toward your page limit.

Environment

What external factors (current events, market or technology trends, social or cultural factors, etc) played an important part in this case?

The Brand or Issue

*If a brand*:

* What is it? What does it do? How does it work?
* What was the brand’s position in the market versus the competition as the case began? What were trends in the brand’s market position over time?
* What were key business or marketing objectives?
* What programs were in place, if any, for reaching those objectives? How effective had those efforts been?
* How had the organization communicated with its key audiences in the past (targets, messages, programs, spending)? How effective have those communications been?

*If an issue:*

* What did the client organization want to promote, advocate or accomplish? Why?
* What programs were in place, if any, for reaching the client’s goals? How effective had those programs been?
* Did the organization face competition? If so, what competition was it facing? What kind of threat, if any, did the competition pose?
* How did the organization communicate with key audiences in the past? How effective had the communications been?
* What was the history and nature of communications (press coverage, Internet, etc.) about the organization or its issues that was *not* generated by the client? What had been the outcome of those communications?

Audiences

* Who were the key stakeholders in this case, internally and externally (directors, Board, advisors, funding organizations, government, supporters, influencers, employees, agencies, press, clients, customers, distributors, different segments of consumers, buyers, users, important influencers, voters, viewers, readers, the trade, business partners, investors, etc.)?
* Which audience(s) or segment(s) was/were most critical in this case? Why?
* What were each important audience’s historical and/or current relationship to the issue or to the brand (eg, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, behavior, self-image, etc.)? Had those relationships been changing in any significant way over time?
* How did the different audiences relate to each other?
* What did each audience see as viable alternative choices to what the organization was offering, or to what the brand offered?
* How did each audience make decisions or choices in relationship to the issue or to the brand? What did the audience consider when choosing? What benefits were important to them? What steps were involved? Who was involved at each step of the decision process?
* What did the client know about the lives of audience members that helped the client reach them with communications and make an impact?

Competition/Barriers/Obstacles

*If a brand:*

* How did the competition compare to our brand (what the competing brand was, what it did, or how it worked) in the minds of key audiences?
* Who were the competition’s key audiences?
* What was the competition’s position in the market? Had competition’s market position been changing over time?
* What were the competition’s key business or marketing objectives?
* What programs did the competition have in place? How effective were they?
* What had each important audience’s historical and/or current relationship been to the competition (i.e. attitudes, beliefs, emotions, behavior, self-image, etc.)? Had those relationships changed in any significant way over time?
* How did competition communicate with key audiences? What was the outcome of those communications?

*If an issue:*

* Who or what were the primary barriers or obstacles to the client organization achieving its stated objective?
* What were the relevant characteristics of those obstacles (individuals, groups, organizations, history, or some other kind of obstacle)?
* What actions had opposing individuals, groups or organizations taken?
* How did those opposing individuals, groups, or organizations communicate with key constituents? How effective had the communications been?

**Relevant Experience**

This section outlines the experience other organizations have had using communications to address issues similar to the situation your client was faced in this case. It can include experience your client has had using communications to address other, similar issues in other cases. The experience can have been successful or unsuccessful. What made the situations these other organizations faced similar to your client’s in this case? What kind of communications programs (target, message, integrated tactics) did these other organizations employ? How effective—or ineffective--were their communications programs? What lessons can strategic communicators take from these experiences?

Please cite sources. Consider including graphics, charts, or illustrations. They will not count toward your page limit.

**Your Client’s Communications Program**

This section is the heart of your written case study. It should outline the communications program your client actually employed to solve the problem in this case. It should include information about the target audience(s), objective(s), role(s) for communications, message(s), integrated communications tactics, and any other relevant and important information about the client’s communications program. It should also include the reasons why the client chose each element of the communications program. Again, please cite sources.

You may organize this section however you like. Please make it clear and reader-friendly. You may consider discussing, for example, the target audiences first, with the reasons why the client chose these audiences. Then move on to the message with the client’s reasons for it, the integrated tactical plan, results, etc. Or you may organize the section in some other way. Consider including graphics, charts, or illustrations. They will not count toward your page limit.

**Results**

This section should outline the results of the client’s communications program, citing sources. Please frame the results in terms of the objectives. Did the program meet its in-going business or communications objective(s)? Consider including graphics, charts, or illustrations. They will not count toward your page limit.

**Your Assessment of the Case**

Close the written case study with a summary of your personal assessment of the client’s communications programs. You might consider these thought-starter questions:

* Was the client’s communications program a success? Why or why not?
* What were the strongest elements of the client’s communications program? Why?
* What could the client have done better? Why?
* What learning can a strategic communicator take from this case that could shed light on other, similar cases in the future?

**Appendices**

Source list and citations (required)

Description of primary research (required).

Additional figures or images (e.g. competitive communications, historical communications, etc.)