

FOR STUDENTS: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:

Connecting Business Communication (BCom) with Civic Literacy

As we explore Business Communication (BCom) and how it shapes the way businesses interact with their stakeholders, it is essential to understand how it ties into broader civic principles. Effective business communication isn't just about conveying information—it's also about promoting **ethics, legal compliance, and social responsibility** in a way that aligns with civic values and human rights.

The two competencies from the FCLE (Florida Civic Literacy Exam) that most directly apply to **Business Communication (BCom)** in relation to civic literacy are:

1) American Democracy: Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government.

In the context of Business Communication, understanding **American Democracy** is crucial because businesses operate within a framework shaped by democratic values such as **free speech, equal opportunity, transparency, and accountability**. When businesses communicate with stakeholders, they are engaging in practices that should reflect the democratic principles of fairness, honesty, and social responsibility. **For example, businesses are bound to communicate truthfully and are subject to laws that prevent misleading advertising (such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Act), which supports democratic values of consumer protection and information transparency.**

Furthermore, businesses influence and are influenced by public policies, which are shaped through democratic processes. Understanding these processes helps businesses make informed decisions about **public relations, lobbying, advocacy, and corporate social responsibility (CSR)** initiatives, all of which require clear and ethical communication to support democratic engagement and social trust.

2) Landmark Impact on Law & Society: An understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society.

The **impact of landmark legislation and Supreme Court cases** is highly relevant to business communication because laws and legal precedents directly influence how businesses communicate internally and externally. For example:

- **The Civil Rights Act of 1964** (Title VII), which prohibits discrimination in employment, has led businesses to communicate more inclusively and ensure that hiring practices are free from bias.
- **Citizens United v. FEC** (2010), which allowed corporations to spend unlimited amounts on political campaigns, directly influenced how businesses engage in political communication and advocacy. As a result, businesses now must be aware of the legal and ethical ramifications of their public statements, including how they may be perceived by different stakeholder groups.

HOW TO CONNECT THEM THROUGH LANDMARKS (Competency 4):

Understanding how landmark cases shape laws and how these laws affect business practices will allow you (the student) to grasp the significance of **legal compliance** and **responsible communication** in the corporate world. It will also help them understand the role of communication in influencing public opinion and the social responsibility that businesses must take on as part of their civic duty.

By tying these two competencies to **Business Communication**, you can see how the **constitutional framework** and **democratic principles** inform and shape corporate practices, both legally and ethically

1. Ethical Communication and Transparency

In civics, **ethics** and **transparency** are fundamental values. Just as governments are expected to be transparent in their actions and hold themselves accountable to their citizens, businesses have the responsibility to communicate transparently with their stakeholders. This includes clear communication regarding corporate practices, policies, and decisions that affect public welfare.

- **Example:** The **Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002** was enacted in the wake of corporate scandals like Enron to enforce transparency in financial reporting. The Act requires businesses to disclose more detailed financial information, which is essential for building trust with stakeholders and the public. This connects directly to the civic value of accountability.
- **Case Study:** The **Volkswagen emissions scandal** (2015) highlighted the failure of ethical communication, where the company's attempts to conceal their emissions cheating affected both consumers and the environment. This breach of transparency not only harmed the business but also damaged public trust in the company.

Assignment:

Understand the link between ethical business communication, transparency, and civic responsibility by analyzing the **Volkswagen emissions scandal**.

1. Research the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal (2015):

- Investigate the Volkswagen emissions scandal, focusing on the defeat devices used to cheat emissions tests. Identify the key events and the company's initial response.

3. Write a Case Study Answering These Questions:

- Background:** What happened during the Volkswagen emissions scandal? What was the impact on consumers and the environment?
- Failure of Ethical Communication:** How did Volkswagen's actions violate ethical communication and transparency? How did this affect stakeholders like consumers and regulators?
- Consequences for the Company:** What were the legal and financial consequences for Volkswagen? How did the scandal harm the company's reputation and public trust?
- Civic Responsibility and Business Ethics:** How does this case show the importance of businesses acting ethically and transparently? Connect this to civic responsibility and accountability.
- Lessons and Recommendations:** What lessons can businesses learn from this scandal? How can businesses improve communication and ethical practices moving forward?

4. Conclusion:

Summarize the key takeaways from the scandal. Reflect on how businesses should balance ethical communication, transparency, and civic responsibility in their practices.

Key Takeaway: Just as the U.S. Constitution emphasizes transparency in government through rule of law, ethical business communication builds trust and supports the **public good**.

2. Legal and Regulatory Communication

Civics literacy emphasizes the importance of understanding laws, rights, and responsibilities in a democratic society. Similarly, businesses must ensure that their communications adhere to **legal** standards and provide stakeholders with accurate, lawful information about their rights.

- Example:** The **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)** (1938) regulates minimum wage, overtime, and child labor. Businesses need to communicate these standards clearly to their employees and the public. Misleading or incomplete communication about compensation and working conditions violates both legal standards and civic principles.
- Case Study:** In **Brown v. Board of Education** (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court's decision emphasized the importance of equal treatment under the law, particularly in public institutions. Similarly, businesses must ensure their communication is legally

compliant and promotes **equality** and **justice**, such as in advertising or employment practices.

Objective:

Examine how landmark legal cases, like **Brown v. Board of Education**, shape laws around equality, rights, and communication in business. Understand the importance of legal compliance and transparent communication within a democratic society.

ASSIGNMENT

1. **Research Brown v. Board of Education (1954):** Investigate the case and its significance. Focus on the Supreme Court's ruling that public schools must integrate and provide equal treatment for all students, regardless of race.
2. **Write a Case Study Answering These Questions:**
 - a. **Background:** Briefly describe the Brown v. Board of Education case. What was the legal issue, and what was the ruling?
 - b. **Legal and Regulatory Communication:** How does this case emphasize the importance of legal compliance and communication in promoting equality and justice? How does this relate to businesses ensuring legal compliance in their communication with employees, customers, and the public?
 - c. **Impact on Business Practices:** How does this case show the importance of promoting equality in business practices? Provide examples of how businesses can apply the ruling's principles to areas like advertising, hiring, and customer service.
 - d. **Civic Responsibility:** How does this case connect to civic values such as fairness and equal treatment under the law? Discuss the responsibility businesses have to communicate and act in ways that support these values.

Summarize the key lessons from the case. Reflect on how businesses can uphold legal standards and communicate ethically to promote equality and justice in their practices.

Key Takeaway: Just as citizens must understand their rights under the Constitution, employees and consumers must understand their rights in the marketplace. Businesses have a civic duty to communicate within the law.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Civic Engagement

Civics literacy teaches that individuals and organizations must contribute to society's welfare. Businesses, too, have a responsibility to engage in **corporate social responsibility (CSR)**—voluntary actions taken to improve societal well-being. Business communication plays a central role in promoting these efforts and informing the public about the company's contributions.

- **Example:** The **Foreign Corrupt Practices Act** (1977) prohibits U.S. companies from bribing foreign officials, but it also encourages businesses to adopt responsible and transparent communication strategies. Promoting ethical behavior and engaging with communities aligns with the broader civic goal of **justice** and **public interest**.
- **Case Study: Patagonia**, a company known for its commitment to environmental sustainability, uses its platform to advocate for environmental protection. Through its transparent communication and environmental campaigns, it encourages both customers and businesses to consider their civic responsibilities toward the planet.

Assignment:

Understand the connection between corporate social responsibility (CSR), civic engagement, and business communication. Explore how businesses can contribute to society's welfare through ethical practices and transparent communication.

Instructions:

1. Research Patagonia's CSR Efforts:

- Investigate Patagonia's approach to corporate social responsibility, particularly its commitment to environmental sustainability. Focus on how the company uses its platform to promote environmental protection and civic responsibility.

3. Write a Case Study Answering These Questions:

- Background:** Briefly describe Patagonia's CSR efforts. What specific initiatives or actions have they taken to promote environmental sustainability and public welfare?
- Corporate Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement:** How does Patagonia demonstrate its commitment to CSR and civic engagement? Discuss how the company uses transparent communication to advocate for environmental causes.
- Impact on Business Practices:** How has Patagonia's CSR approach influenced its brand reputation and customer loyalty? How does this reflect broader civic goals of justice and the public interest?
- Lessons for Businesses:** What can other companies learn from Patagonia's approach to CSR? How can businesses engage in socially responsible actions and effectively communicate their contributions to the public?

Summarize the key takeaways from Patagonia's CSR efforts. Reflect on how businesses can align their practices with civic values and promote societal well-being through responsible and transparent communication.

Key Takeaway: Business communication that aligns with CSR not only fosters public trust but also contributes to the well-being of society, reinforcing civic values like social justice and community involvement.

4. Political and Civic Literacy in Branding and Advocacy

Business communication is often used to influence public opinion, whether through advertising, public relations, or corporate advocacy. Many companies use their platform to address political and social issues. This can have a profound impact on public awareness and civic participation.

- **Example: Citizens United v. FEC (2010)** was a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that allowed corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money in political campaigns. This ruling raised important questions about the influence of business communication on public policy and civic life.
- **Case Study: Ben & Jerry's** is known for its advocacy on social justice issues, including **climate change, racial equality, and LGBTQ+ rights**. Through its **business communication**, Ben & Jerry's has influenced public discourse, showing that businesses can play an active role in civic engagement.

Objective:

Examine how businesses use their platform to influence public opinion and engage in civic issues. Understand the role of political and civic literacy in branding and advocacy.

Assignment:

1. **Research Ben & Jerry's Advocacy Efforts:**
2. Investigate how Ben & Jerry's uses its brand to advocate for social justice issues, including climate change, racial equality, and LGBTQ+ rights. Focus on how the company communicates these issues through its products, marketing, and public statements.
3. **Write a Case Study Answering These Questions:**
 - a. **Background:** Briefly describe Ben & Jerry's involvement in social justice causes. What specific issues has the company publicly supported?
 - b. **Political and Civic Literacy in Branding:** How does Ben & Jerry's use its branding to influence public opinion on political and social issues? Discuss how their business communication affects civic participation and awareness.
 - c. **Impact on Public Discourse:** How has Ben & Jerry's advocacy shaped public discourse on issues like climate change, racial equality, and LGBTQ+ rights? What role does corporate communication play in these efforts?

- d. **Lessons for Other Companies:** What can other businesses learn from Ben & Jerry's approach to civic engagement? How can companies use their platforms to promote positive social change and encourage civic involvement?

Summarize the key takeaways from Ben & Jerry's approach to advocacy. Reflect on how businesses can engage in political and civic literacy to influence public opinion and contribute to social change.

Key Takeaway: Businesses have a civic responsibility to use their voice and communication channels to engage with societal issues, influence policy, and promote values that benefit the public.

As you study Business Communication (BCom), always keep in mind the **connection to civics literacy**. Effective communication is not only about presenting information—it's about ensuring that this information promotes **ethical behavior, transparency, legal compliance, and social responsibility**. By integrating these civic principles into business practices, you'll be better equipped to contribute to society and the economy in meaningful ways.