Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

Public relations professionals must be strong, polished writers who can work quickly and adapt to changing environments and needs. It is imperative that students recognize the importance of excellent writing for success in both the public relations profession and day-to-day business. In this course, you will master the core qualities of excellent public relations writing and develop the skills to build communications materials for real clients.

This course is centered on you and your needs. As such, the course will provide the opportunity for hands-on learning and real-world applications to help you gain experience and build a robust portfolio that showcases your strategic writing skills.

Please note: The Summer A PR writing course is **extremely fast-paced** and works on a very demanding schedule, mimicking how your professional role would be in public relations. It is up to you to keep up with readings, lectures, assignments and discussion posts. Remember I am here for any questions or guidance you may have or need. Due to the COVID-19 situation, we had to shift to an online-only classroom setting. Although I would have loved to have gotten to know you each in class, I am still dedicated to offering you a high-quality and meaningful PR writing course experience.

The course will include:

Lectures and discussions focused on reading assignments, current news and case studies. Reading assignments are included in this syllabus and will be posted online or distributed in class. Please continue to monitor the Canvas site for additional readings than what is included in the syllabus. Students are expected to keep up with the readings.

Writing assignments, during which you'll apply what we've discussed in class. Over the course of these in-class assignments, you'll develop a series of public relations materials, including news releases, fact sheets, media briefs and more. You will work under tight deadlines that simulate industry environments.

Using current events and topics, we will cover all areas of public relations writing, including press releases, op/ed pieces, speeches and press advisories. We will also cover recent technological changes such as the growth of blogging and social media, providing an understanding of how technology impacts the public relations industry.

A media kit project for a client of your choice. Most of your writing assignments will be completed on behalf of this client, as you build the media kit for a communications campaign. The client must be an existing, real organization. You do not have to obtain permission from the client or notify them.

*** This syllabus is subject to change as the instructor deems appropriate and necessary.**

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this class, students will master the basic writing skills of public relations professionals to prepare them to meet the demands of today's industry. Students will:

- Recognize the importance of excellent writing for success in both the public relations profession and day-to-day business;

- Learn to write clear, concise, compelling, accurate and logically organized materials and content, following style and grammar rules;

- Develop public relations materials (such as key messages, backgrounders, media briefs, media lists, etc.) that effectively and strategically meet your public relations objectives;

- Understand the purpose of such public relations materials and learn when and how to strategically use these;

- Learn how to tailor communications – including content, style and format – based on your target audiences and public relations objectives;

- Develop and apply critical thinking, listening and professional skills through assignments that mimic industry work with clients and peers.

COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM & COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that by graduation all students should be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the US;

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;

- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;

- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

- Think critically, creatively and independently;

- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;

- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;

- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

PREREQUISITES

To enroll in this course, you must have completed and received a grade of C or better in PUR3000 (Principles of Public Relations) and JOU3101 (Reporting). Familiarity with visual design is helpful, but not necessary.

COURSE MATERIALS

Students must stay current with all reading assignments, which must be completed prior to class. ***Please note that readings on syllabus are subject to change. Students should ALWAYS check Canvas for the latest readings.***

Students should post meaningful discussion posts on Canvas. This will count toward the student's class participation grade.

Students may choose to purchase or rent the required course books. Additional required readings may be assigned throughout the course.

Required

- Wilcox, Dennis L., and Bryan H. Reber. Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques. 8th ed., Pearson, 2016. (ISBN: 0134010493)

- Kessler, Lauren, and Duncan McDonald. When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style. 9th ed., Cengage Learning, 2016. (ISBN: 1285052471)

- Selected other web readings assigned by instructor (check syllabus).

- USB Flash Drive – This will be used to save and back up all writing assignments.

Recommended

- The Associated Press Stylebook 2018 and Briefing on Media Law. The Associated Press, 2019. (ISBN: 0917360672)

- Strunk, William, and E. B. White. The Elements of Style. 4th ed., Pearson, 2014. (ISBN: 020530902X)

- Students are also encouraged to read public relations publications (i.e. PR Week, PR News) and stay up to date with current events.

COURSE PROFESSIONALISM

The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school, and professional decorum is expected at all times. I expect you to adhere to workplace norms of collegial and respectful interaction, as will I.

Students will conduct themselves in an honest, ethical and courteous manner with other students and the instructor, abiding by the UF Student Conduct & Honor Codes.

Students are expected to welcome and respect the diverse opinions of their peers and instructor.

Violations of these guidelines may result in being asked to leave the classroom and a lower class participation grade.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The work you submit for this course must be your own. You must never use direct or paraphrased material from any source, including websites, without citation.

Citation means providing attribution within the text for any ideas, insights or facts that are not your own. To clarify, you may not copy anything word for word from any source without putting quotes around it and attributing the source. This includes organizations' or companies' websites, internal documents and materials.

For this class, we will use the MLA in-text citation method. You must also list your sources in a bibliography.

All work submitted must be original work for this course. You may not submit anything that you wrote for another class, an internship, as a volunteer or in another academic or professional setting. You may not submit anything that was written for any purpose other than the given assignment. Plagiarizing another student's work or having another student complete the assignment for you is considered academic dishonesty.

I will handle any incident of academic dishonesty in accordance with the UF Honor Code that provides examples of unethical academic behavior, such as cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation and fabrication. Any case of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for this course. I will follow university guidelines for any offense.

You may review the Student Conduct & Honor Codes here: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/.

WEEKLY LECTURES

At least one (typically more) lecture video will be posted to the course website on Canvas for each of the 6 weeks. These videos will vary in length depending on the material. It is your responsibility to watch each of the videos. Although it is possible to watch the pre-recorded video lectures at any time and at any pace, keeping up with the videos week to week according to the schedule will be easier as many build off the other along with the weekly readings.

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ASSIGNMENTS

Participating on the course discussion board will be part of your grade (See below)

Because this is an online, asynchronously delivered course, attendance in the form of calling roll will not occur; however, students are expected to sign onto the course site at least once each day to check for course updates in the announcements and discussion sections of the site.

DISCUSSION BOARDS

Discussion Boards are a key part of this online course. Review all module content prior to posting. Then familiarize yourself with the discussion board scenario/question and post your initial discussion item. You are also required to read all and comment on a minimum of two student posts (per discussion board). You must post your initial post before you respond to your classmates' contributions. You will not be able to edit your post, so take time to ensure your post is complete for submission before you officially post.

Discussion Boards will be graded on the following criteria:

Content, Contribution of Original Thought, Connection to Course Material, Spelling and Grammar, and Deadline.

Deadline: First post (addressing the instructor posed questions) will be submitted by THURSDAY at 11:59PM (ET) and the minimum two meaningful responses are submitted before SUNDAY at 11:59 PM (ET).

Discussion Board Grading Rubric: Your discussion grades are two parts: 50 total points for your initial post, 50 points for your responses. Both initial post and responses will be graded on the same criteria.

Discussion Boards will be graded on the following criteria: Content, Contribution of Original Thought, Connection to Course Material, Spelling and Grammar, and Deadline.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be "client-ready," which means they have been proofread, reviewed and formatted so that they are ready to submit to your client – or in this case, to your instructor.

Everything you write for this course must be coherent, logical and carefully edited. Misspellings, syntax and grammatical errors are unacceptable, especially in work by public relations students, and will greatly affect your grade. AP Style guidelines should be followed for all materials.

You must submit all assignments on Canvas as typed, word documents.

Public relations professionals are often bound by tight, important deadlines and missing these can damage their and their clients' credibility. As part of being successful communication industry practitioners, meeting deadlines is critical, so no assignments, quizzes or discussion posts will be accepted after due date.

Lost files are not an acceptable excuse for late or missing work. Remember Murphy's Law. Please back up all your files; you may choose to do so on a USB flash drive, Google Drive, iCloud, Dropbox, etc.

GRADING POLICY

Your grade will be determined by performance on writing assignments throughout the semester and your class participation. There will be one exam in this course and AP Style quizzes will be given throughout the semester.

Final grades will be based on the following scale:

• A 90 – 100 percent

• B 80 – 89 percent

• C 70 – 79 percent

• D 60 – 69 percent

• E 0 – 59 percent

Components of Your Final Grade

• Writing Assignments (30 percent) – There will be several writing assignments on which you will be graded. For select assignments, you will submit the first draft (for in-class critique and revisions) and a final draft. All assignments, including drafts, must be submitted to receive credit. Select writing assignments will be completed and due in class. These will be completed "on deadline," simulating industry demands.

• Exam (10 percent) – There will be one exam. The final exam will require both multiple choice and short-form responses.

• AP Style Quizzes (10 percent) – AP Style quizzes will be given throughout the semester. I will notify you of the topics with which you need to become familiar.

• Media Kit Project (35 percent) – This is your final project for the course, and as such, it is weighted heavily. You will complete several components throughout the semester. If you received a low score, this is your opportunity to revise accordingly. I'm available for one-on-one Zoom or phone meetings or on email to answer any questions and provide guidance. A separate rubric will be provided for this project.

• Class Participation (15 percent) – Class participation will be graded via online discussions. You will have at least one discussion post per week. You must provide a meaningful response that

is at least two paragraphs by Thursday of the week and at least two meaningful feedback comments to classmates by Sunday of the week. Late discussion posts will not be accepted. Incomplete discussion posts will mean less points.

How assignments will be graded

I will grade all assignments on a 100-point scale.

- A 90 – 100 percent – professional and could be published as-is

- B 80 – 89 percent – strong but needs minor revisions

- C 70 – 79 percent – errors needs major revisions

- D 60 – 69 percent – needs to be re-written

- E 0 – 59 percent – unacceptable/missed deadline

Below is a general rubric:

- Content (60 percent) – Points are awarded for clear, compelling, accurate and logically organized writing. Points are also awarded for demonstrating an understanding of the assignment.

- Creativity & Strategy (10 percent) – Points are awarded for creative, interesting and strategic work that shows you understand your client and audiences. The writing keeps the reader glued to the page.

- Grammar, Citations & AP Style (20 percent) – These are the basics, including syntax, spelling, grammar, punctuation, AP style and MLA citations.

- Submission & Presentation (10 percent) – All work must be client-ready and follow instructions for format.

The following will negatively affect your grades:

- Grammatical, spelling or typographical error – 2 points deducted

- AP Style error – 2 points deducted

- Fact error, including misspelling any proper name – 10 points deducted

- Missing citation – 10 points deducted

- Using the wrong format – 10 points deducted

Assignments that do not include citations or are submitted late will receive a 0.

OFFICE HOURS, APPOINTMENTS & EMAIL

Please schedule an appointment with me via email. I am happy to meet individually via Zoom or phone.

I will also be available to answer questions and provide feedback via email ns on Canvas. I will do my best to reply as soon as possible, but please allow up to 48 hours for a response. Please do not email me with a question about your assignment within 24 hours of the due date. If an emergency arises in which you cannot complete your assignment by the deadline, reach out to me ASAP. You may or may not receive partial or full credit.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students requesting classroom accommodation should first register with the Dean of Students Office's Disability Resource Center. The Dean of Students Office will provide an accommodation letter that must be presented to me when requesting accommodation. Students should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

To contact the Disability Resource Center, visit www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ or call 352-392-8565.

ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION POLICY

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/.

Important Dates:

Classes begin: May 11

Classes end: June 19

Holidays:

May 25th- Memorial Day Holiday

Course Content and Schedule

May 11-15-

Introduction to Course

- •   Instructor introduction
- •   Course Overview
- •   Review syllabus and all relevant course materials
- •   Overview of class project and CSR

MODULE 1- Getting Organized for Writing and Persuasive Writing

- •   Class Lecture and Discussion: Getting Organized for Writing and Persuasive Writing
- •   Continue overview of class project
- •   Client Discussion and Corporate Social Responsibility

Read:

- •   Chapters 1 and 2, Wilcox, Dennis L., and Bryan H. Reber. Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques: Getting Organized for Writing and Becoming a Persuasive Writer
- •   Chapter 1 of Kessler, Lauren, and Duncan McDonald. When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style.
- •   "How to Write a PR Proposal"
- •   What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

MODULE 2- Business Communications

- •   Class Lecture and Discussion: Business Communications
- •   Client Selection

Read:

- •   Improve Your Public Relations Writing with These Tips
- •   "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 232-240 ("Writing Email, Memos and Proposals" – Only the email and memorandum sections)

MODULE 3- Research and Planning and AP style

- •   Class Lecture and Discussion
- •   Creating your AP style basics cheat sheet
- •   AP Style discussion

Read (also posted on Canvas)

- •   6 Steps To Decoding Your Target Audience – by Jason Demers for Forbes (~8-min. read)
- •   10 Ways to Learn About Your Target Audience – by Jason Demers for Entrepreneur (~7-min. read)
- •   PR Pros Guides to AP Style

MODULE 1-3 Assignments:

- Select CSR partnership and client (send to Professor for approval)
- Mock Client Email (professionalism/business communications) due May 17th on Canvas
- Prepare two paragraph proposal on client selection (due May 17th on Canvas)
- Client research assignment (due May 17th)
- Discussion posts
- Study guide for AP style/grammar quiz

May 18-22

MODULE 4-Word Choice and Style

- Class Lecture and Discussion
- More CSR discussion
- More work on AP Style cheat sheet
- Study Guide for Quiz

Read:

- When Words Collide – Chapter 2 – "10 Little Secrets, 10 Big Mistakes"
- When Words Collide – Chapter 3 – Parts of Speech, Part 1: The Verb is THE Word
- When Words Collide – Chapter 4 – Parts of Speech, Part 2: Completing the Picture
- PR For A Purpose: Bringing Corporate Social Responsibility Back To Basics

MODULE 5: Message Strategy, Storytelling and Branding

- Class lecture and discussion
- Quiz #1
- Will take Q&A via email about CSR plan

Read:

- Key message development: Building a foundation for effective communications – by Debbie Wetherhead for PRSay (~4-min. read)
- The science of what makes people care – by Ann Christiano and Annie Neimand for The Stanford Social Innovation Review (~28-min. read)
- How to Create Compelling Key Messages
- Six Word Stories, Statements and Exclamations: a Journaling Exercise
  - Think about your 6-word story and write something. Be prepared to share in class.

MODULE 6- Understanding the media, what's newsworthy, creating news

- Class Lecture and Discussion
- Key message Q&A

Read:

- Chapters 3 and 4, Wilcox, Dennis L., and Bryan H. Reber. Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques, Finding and Making News and Working with Journalists and Bloggers
- The importance of empathy in media relations – by Michael Smart for PRsay (~2-min. read)
- How to uncover great story ideas – by Michael Smart for PRsay (~3-min. read)

MODULE 4-6 Assignments:

- CSR plan (due May 24)
- Key messages (Due May 24)
- Quiz 1 due May 24
- Discussion Post due May 24

May 25-29:

MODULE 7- 7.1: Writing for the Media: News releases

- Class Lecture and Discussion
- News release exercise

Read:

- Chapter 5, Wilcox, Dennis L., and Bryan H. Reber. Writing the News Release
- Nine Tips for Writing an Effective News Release by Chris Richardson
- 7 Top Tips for Editing your News Release by Emma Curtin
- 10 Knock-Their-Socks-Off Press Release Headline Writing Tips in Comms Best Practices
- Top 34 Press Release Examples from the Pros by Kristi Brown
-

Module 7: 7.2: Writing for the Media: Fact Sheets, FAQs & Media Advisories

- Class Lecture and Discussion
- Fact Sheets and Media Advisories

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 97-105 ("Preparing Fact Sheets, Advisories, Media Kits & Pitches")
- Check out some organizations' fact sheets
  - American Airlines
  - Starbucks
  - Coca-Cola
  - University of Florida

Module 7: 7.3: Writing for the Media: Pitch Letters & Media Lists

- Class Lecture and Discussion
- Pitch Letter and Media List

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 105-112 ("Pitching a Story")
- The 7 Ds of PR outreach: Creating a media list that actually works – by Ashley Halberstadt for Hubspot (~5-min. read)
- Pitch imperfect: PR's lost art – by Peter Himler for PRWeek (~8-min. read)
- Sorry not sorry: Cold pitching requires a new attitude – by Michael Smart for PRsay (~3-min. read)

May 25-29 Assignments

- News release due May 31
- Media Advisory Due May 31
- Pitch Letter and Media List May 31
- Discussion Post

June 1-June 5

Module 7: 7.4 Writing for the Media: Speech Writing and Presentations

- Class Lecture and Discussion

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 245-257 ("Giving Speeches and Presentations" – stop in the section about being a panelist)
- 6 tips for writing a persuasive speech (on any topic) – by Adam Frankel, former senior speechwriter for President Obama, for TIME (~4-min. read)
- 10 keys to writing a speech – by Jeff Schmitt for Forbes (~8-min. read)

Module 7: 7.5: Writing for the Media: Writing Opinion Pieces

- Class Lecture and Discussion

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 127-130 ("Writing Opinion Pieces)
- When Words Collide: Chapter 8- Clarity and Conciseness

- When Words Collide: Chapter 6- Making the Case for Agreement

Module 8: Preparing for Interviews: Interview Briefs & Media Trainings

- Class lecture and discussion

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 258-262 ("Being a Good Panelist" and "Speaker Training and Placement")
- How to prepare and coach executives through media interviews – by Brian Conlin for Cision

June 1- June 5 Assignments

- Speech due June 7
- Op/Ed due June 7
- Interview Brief Due June 7
- Discussion Posts

June 8-12

Module 9: Multimedia Assets: Photos, Captions and Infographics

- Class lecture and discussion

Read

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 132-149 ("Publicity Photos and Infographics")
- 10 tips for improving your photos and videos – by Russell Working for PRSay (~5-min. read)
- Why Photo Captions are Important
- The Ultimate Guide to Writing Good Instagram Photo Captions

Module 10: Social Media and Public Relations Writing

- Class lecture and discussion

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques" – pg. 194-210 ("Social Media and Mobile Apps")

- [6 ways social media changed public relations](#) – by Jim Dougherty for Cision (~8-min read)
- [How to Build Your Social Media Marketing Strategy](#)– by Brent Barnhart for Sprout Social (~15-min. read)
- [How to Create a Social Media Plan that Works-](#) Post Planner.com

Module 11 Social Media Influencer

- Class lecture and discussion

Read:

- "Situational Influence: A New Model for a New Era," by Brown and Fiorella, in *Influence Marketing* (posted on Canvas)
- [Five Key Trends Shaping Influencer Marketing In 2019](#)- Forbes (~4 min read)
- [5 mistakes for brands to avoid when choosing a celebrity endorser](#) – by Janet Comenos for Adweek (~4-min read)
- [How to hire an influencer for your business](#) – by Mark Schaefer, Grow (~8-min. read)

June 8-12 Assignments

- Photos and Captions due June 14
- Social Media Plan due June 14
- Influencer Brief due June 14
- Discussion Posts due June 14

June 15-19:

Module 12-Writing for the Web/Resume Workshop

- Course Lecture and Discussion

Read:

- "Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques"- pg. 175-192 ("Websites, Blogs and Podcasts")
- [The Internet is changing the PR industry](#)
- [How to Write a Resume for Public Relations](#) From Everything-PR.com
- [A Resume Refresh](#) (from MyPRSA Publications)
- [Thank you email after an interview examples](#) – by Alison Doyle for The Balance Careers (~6-min. read)

Final Lecture- Media Kit and Exam Review (Send specific questions to me via Canvas; opportunity to attend Zoom Lecture live if wanted; will send specifics via Canvas and email)

June 15-19 Assignments

- Writing for the Web due June 19
- EXAM due June 19

June 19: MEDIA KIT DUE