

MMC6939: Strategic Writing for Public Relations

Spring 2018

Instructor

Anath Hartmann

Contact

anathhartmann@ufl.edu, my email address, is always the best way to reach me. I will respond promptly to all messages. However, please try your hardest not to email me with: 1) Questions that can be answered with a thorough syllabus read-through (due dates, etc.) or 2) Tech-related questions pertaining to online-classroom access. Questions about article links I've posted that are for some reason suddenly not working, etc., are fine and encouraged. It's the general troubleshooting stuff I won't be able to help with and would prefer not to be asked. For those, the school's IT department is your best bet.

Office Hours:

By appointment, virtual (please email to set up)

Instructor Bio:

I am a former local-news reporter and public-relations executive and a current freelance writer. I love to write and aim to share that passion with each of you! I have a BA in English and writing from Georgetown University and a master's degree in public-affairs journalism from the University of Maryland. I am a Washington, D.C., native, but lucky enough to be married to a Floridian. 😊

Course Website and Login

Your course is Canvas (UF e-Learning). Go to <http://lss.at.ufl.edu>. Click the blue e-Learning button. Login with your GatorLink account. Your course will be in the Courses menu on the left navigation. You might have to click All Courses at the bottom depending on how many courses you have taken at UF.

Contact UF Helpdesk <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu/> (352) 392-HELP (4357) if you have any trouble with accessing your course.

Course Description:

This course exists to teach students to write and think in order to be successful in the public-relations workplace. Its curriculum will cover and include not just writing to and for the media, but also approaching and building and maintaining relationships with members of the press corps.

Course Objectives:

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

- Ideate and craft pitches that pique the interest of media members;
- More confidently reach out to and approach members of the media with client story ideas;
- Write effective, approachable social-media posts that both please clients and interest the media;
- Write and/or pitch earned client media that gets placed

Course Expectations:

This course takes place entirely online and is asynchronous. Most weeks there will be a video lecture featuring me, your instructor, discussing the material we will be learning over the next seven days. There will also be several multi-tiered discussion-forum questions each week, and these will be drawn from the assigned reading, be that reading online articles I've linked to in the online classroom or selections from the textbook.

As mentioned in my introductory video lecture, I expect cordiality and professionalism from each of my students in their interactions with each another and me. I ask that we follow the Golden Rule in our class forums and during any correspondence undertaken for the mid-term team project: Treat each other the way you would like to be treated.

More About Weekly Discussion Forums

'Attendance' will be measured through your participation in each of the online discussion forums. While there is no word-count requirement to these, very short responses that do not demonstrate an understanding of the material being discussed will get lower marks than well-thought-out, comprehensive comments and answers that show clearly the writer has read the material. This doesn't mean longer always equals better. After all, part of this course is about learning to 'lean down' our writing and remove the 'fluff.' But a response that is too short to contain all the necessary information will not meet all the requirements.

Some weeks I ask that you respond to a certain number of posts by other students. Where and when this is the case I tell you specifically how many (usually 1-2) I am looking for. These responses, always expected in addition to your own, should be of more than just the 'I-agree-nice-post' variety. In them, feel free to disagree (politely, of course) with your fellow students, but back up your reason(s) for disagreement, generally with evidence from the text at hand. You can also agree with the other student, comment on something in his/her post you found interesting, etc. Just be sure to make your response substantive and refer to the article or chapter of the textbook that we're discussing.

Ownership Education:

As graduate students, you are not passive participants in this course. All students in this Program have a background in marketing, advertising, public relations, journalism, or similar fields. This class allows you to not only take ownership of your educational experience but to also provide your expertise and knowledge in helping your fellow classmates. The Canvas shell will have an open Q&A thread where you should pose questions to your classmates when you have a question as it relates to an assignment or an issue that has come up at work. Your classmates along with your instructor will be able to respond to

these questions and provide feedback and help. This also allows everyone to gain the same knowledge in one location rather than the instructor responding back to just one student which limits the rest of the class from gaining this knowledge.

Required Texts:

(a) "Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format," 8th Edition, by Thomas Blivins (e-book or hard copy)

(b) 2017 AP Stylebook (digital or print edition)

(c) Online articles to be made available in the online classroom and assigned by week

Prerequisite knowledge and skills:

I assume each of you has a basic understanding of both journalism and public relations. This is not to say, of course, that I expect you to have already worked extensively in either field, but I will teach from the jumping-off point that every student understands, for example, the concept of a 'pitch' to a reporter and is at least vaguely acquainted with Associated Press style (and willing to brush up on and become familiar with the latest rules). A foundation of general familiarity with the terms and concepts we will use will be necessary for success in this course.

Teaching Philosophy:

Learning for its own sake is commendable, interesting and a pursuit we should all undertake throughout our lives. However, in my view it is neither the goal nor the job of higher education to provide and impart knowledge in a vacuum. I believe university-level courses, both undergraduate and graduate, should teach 'for the real world.' Learning, I think, occurs best when new knowledge is put to use shortly after acquisition. The knowledge we gain in this course will be applicable in the public-relations workplace, and should thus, for many of you, be 'usable' right away.

Course Policies:

Participation and 'Attendance' Policy:

Please do the assigned readings. All of them. And participate in each week's discussion forums during the week in which they are assigned. Precisely which day or what time you do them is not important to me; you are busy adults, and this course is designed with flexibility in mind. But responding to a discussion-forum question two weeks after the rest of the class has answered it and we've all moved on won't get you the best participation grade.

Late Work and Make-up Policy:

Each of the two major assignments comes with a built-in three-day grace period. That is, if you turn in one of these assignments at any point up to 72 hours after the official due date and time, it will be graded as though it had been submitted on time. Assignments submitted after this grace period will receive a 10% grade deduction for each day they are late.

Again, the discussion-forum responses are due during the week in which they are posted. After that week has passed, unless you have extenuating circumstances that prevented you from completing these or the quizzes and you let me know, you will not receive credit or a chance to make up those items. I am happy to work with you and grant extensions on an as-truly-needed basis, but please don't wait until the end of the term to tell me you were in the hospital with a kidney infection during week four, etc. If there is no real reason for your lateness and the week has passed, there will not be a chance to make up the missed work.

The following are not sufficient reasons for extensions on work:

- Family vacations
- Minor illnesses
- Issues with uploading work: If a student is having technical difficulties with the online classroom, there are other means to submit completed work. Students may email .zip files or even links to Dropbox folders to me via email. Students should compensate for technical difficulties by not waiting until the last minute to submit work.

Technical-issue policy: Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from LSS when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up. Contact UF helpdesk (352) 392-HELP.

Emergency and extenuating circumstances policy: Students who face emergencies, such as a major personal medical issue, a death in the family, serious illness of a family member, or other situations beyond their control should notify their instructors immediately.

Students are also advised to contact the Dean of Students Office if they would like more information on the medical withdrawal or drop process: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/care/medical-withdrawal-process/> .

Students MUST inform their academic advisor before dropping a course, whether for medical or non-medical reasons. Your advisor will assist with notifying professors and go over options for how to proceed with their classes. Your academic advisor is Tiffany Robbert, and she may be reached at trobbert@jou.ufl.edu .

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalogue at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Coursework Submissions:

All assignments, quizzes, etc. will be submitted electronically through Assignments in Canvas.

Deadlines:

This class, like others, involves many deadlines. Here is a reminder. The new lecture starts on Mondays: The following is an example:

- Discussion Forums 11:59 PM ET Sundays
- Mid-semester project 11:59 PM ET March 11 (end of week 7)
- Final project 11:59 PM ET April 9 (end of week 12)

Grading:

Your work will be evaluated according to the following distribution:

- Discussion-forum participation: 20%
- AP-style quizzes: 10% (combined)
- Mid-term group project: 30%
- End-of-term solo project: 40%

The final grade will be awarded as follows. Please note, I round up to the next decimal.

A	100%	to	92.5%
A-	< 92.5%	to	89.5%
B+	< 89.5%	to	86.5%
B	< 86.5%	to	82.5%
B-	< 82.5%	to	79.5%
C+	< 79.5%	to	76.5%
C	< 76.5%	to	72.5%
C-	< 72.5%	to	69.5%
D+	< 69.5%	to	66.5%
D	< 66.5%	to	62.5%
D-	< 62.5%	to	59.5%
F	< 59.5%	to	0%

Current UF grading policies for assigning grade points:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Course and Assignment Details

Weekly Lectures:

I will post a lecture video to Canvas for most of the 12 weeks, as well as two additional videos – one an introduction to the course and course topic, and the other a talk about the syllabus. 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.

Mid-semester group-project details:

Student teams, which I will assign early in the term, will be given a client-crisis scenario and asked to put together a plan to respond in the media (mid-semester). These projects should be written up as Word documents and submitted in the appropriate folder in Canvas. While there is no minimum length for these, I do expect them to be comprehensive and to cover all points mentioned in the assignment sheet (to be made available in Canvas). You will need to use a minimum of six outside sources, and proper citations and a works-cited page will be required. This assignment is due by 11:59 PM ET March 11, at the end of the seventh week of the course.

Assignment 1 Rubric

Criteria	Meets or Exceeds Expectations (20 pts.)	Meets Most Expectations, But Misses Some (15 pts.)	Meets Some Expectations, But Not Most (10 pts.)	Doesn't Meet Expectations (0 pts.)
Plan is reflective of strategies discussed in online classroom and read about in the text				
Plan is comprehensive and of agency quality				
Plan contains at least three ongoing 'action items' for implementation				
Action items flow together and are part of same strategy				

End-of-term solo-project details: Students will each write a three-month plan to get a fictitious client of his/her choosing and description media traction. This will include the writing of one accompanying, sample earned-media piece for the client and information about how and where you would go about placing the piece. Again, this should be in Word and use at least six outside sources. There is no minimum length, but use your best judgment. For example, the earned-media piece should be pitch-ready and thus meet the length, style and tone requirements of the publication to which, in the assignment scenario, it is being sent.

Assignment 2 Rubric

Criteria	Meets or Exceeds Expectations (16.6 pts.)	Meets Most Expectations, But Misses Some (14 pts.)	Meets Some Expectations, But Not Most (10 pts.)	Does Not Meet Expectations (0 pts.)
Client situation and plan are realistic and reflective of strategies discussed in online classroom and read about in the text				
Client ‘backgrounder’ gives full picture of probable company/organization and product/message				
Plan contains at least three realistic, implementable ‘action items’ for the 3-mo. period				
Action items are all part of same strategy				
Earned-media piece is written according to lessons in lectures and readings				
Placement plan for earned-media piece is comprehensive and realistic				

University Policies

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities:

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You

must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

Students with Disabilities who may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to notify the instructor and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) so that reasonable accommodations may be implemented. DRC is located in room 001 in Reid Hall or you can contact them by phone at 352-392-8565.

Netiquette: Communication Courtesy:

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. <http://teach.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf>

Class Demeanor:

Mastery in this class requires preparation, passion, and professionalism. Students are expected, within the requirements allowed by university policy, to do the course work and readings and meet all deadlines. Work assigned in advance of class should be completed as directed. Full participation in online and live discussions, group projects, and small group activities is expected.

My role as instructor is to identify critical issues related to the course, direct you and teach relevant information, assign appropriate learning activities, create opportunities for assessing your performance, and communicate the outcomes of such assessments in a timely, informative, and professional way. Feedback is essential for you to have confidence that you have mastered the material and for me to determine that you are meeting all course requirements.

At all times it is expected you will welcome and respond professionally to assessment feedback, that you will treat your fellow students and me with respect, and that you will contribute to the success of the class as best as you can.

Other Resources:

Other are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/> getting-help for:

- Counseling and Wellness resources
 - <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/> 352-392-1575
- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please contact your program director and/or student support coordinator at distancesupport@jou.ufl.edu or visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints> to submit a complaint.

Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>

Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. 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>

University Policy on Academic Misconduct:

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php>

The University of Florida Honor Code was voted on and passed by the Student Body in the fall 1995 semester. The Honor Code reads as follows:

Preamble: In adopting this Honor Code, the students of the University of Florida recognize that academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students who enroll at the University commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Honor Code. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. A student-run Honor Court and faculty support are crucial to the success of the Honor Code. The quality of a University of Florida education is dependent upon the community acceptance and enforcement of the Honor Code.

The Honor Code: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity."

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied:

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

For more information about academic honesty, contact Student Judicial Affairs, P202 Peabody Hall, 352-392-1261.

Academic Honesty

All graduate students in the College of Journalism and Communications are expected to conduct themselves with the highest degree of integrity. It is the students' responsibility to ensure that they know and understand the requirements of every assignment. At a minimum, this includes avoiding the following:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs when an individual presents the ideas or expressions of another as his or her own. Students must always credit others' ideas with accurate citations and must use quotation marks and citations when presenting the words of others. A thorough understanding of plagiarism is a precondition for admittance to graduate studies in the college.

Cheating: Cheating occurs when a student circumvents or ignores the rules that govern an academic assignment such as an exam or class paper. It can include using notes, in physical or electronic form, in an exam, submitting the work of another as one's own, or reusing a paper a student has composed for one class in another class. If a student is not sure about the rules that govern an assignment, it is the student's responsibility to ask for clarification from his instructor.

Misrepresenting Research Data: The integrity of data in mass communication research is a paramount issue for advancing knowledge and the credibility of our professions. For this reason any intentional 14

misrepresentation of data, or misrepresentation of the conditions or circumstances of data collection, is considered a violation of academic integrity. Misrepresenting data is a clear violation of the rules and requirements of academic integrity and honesty.

Any violation of the above stated conditions is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program and will result in revocation of the degree if the degree previously has been awarded.

Students are expected to adhere to the University of Florida Code of Conduct
<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code>

If you have additional questions, please refer to the Online Graduate Program Student Handbook you received when you were admitted into the Program.

Schedule

Weekly module dates:

Each class week begins on a Monday and ends that Sunday.

Week 1: Jan. 8, 2018 – Jan. 14, 2018

Week 2: Jan. 15, 2018 – Jan. 21, 2018

Week 3: Jan. 22, 2018 – Jan. 28, 2018

Week 4: Feb. 4, 2018 – Feb. 11, 2018

Week 5: Feb. 12, 2018 – Feb. 18, 2018

Week 6: Feb. 19, 2018 – Feb. 25, 2018

Week 7: Feb. 26, 2018 – March 4, 2018

Week 8: March 5, 2018 – March 11, 2018

Week 9: March 12, 2018 – March 18, 2018

Week 10: March 19, 2018 – March 25, 2018

Week 11: March 26, 2018 – April 1, 2018

Week 12: April 2, 2018 – April 8, 2018

Introduction and Syllabus Videos:

- Please see course-intro video here (Coming)
- Please see syllabus-intro video here (Coming)

Course Schedule:

<i>Week, Topic & Assignment</i>	<i>Readings to be discussed (AP Stylebook ongoing)</i>	<i>Assignment/evaluation</i>
January 8 What is writing for public relations and how is it different from other kinds of writing?	Textbook, ch. 1	Discussion-forum questions
January 15 Choosing the right medium for your client's message	Textbook, ch. 4	Discussion-forum questions
February 12 Pitches	Textbook, ch. 5 and TBD articles	Discussion-forum questions
January 22 Press releases, factsheets and media kits	Textbook, ch. 5 (review) & 7, and TBD online article	Discussion-forum questions
February 19 Ethics and mistakes	Textbook ch. 2, TBD online articles	Discussion-forum questions
February 26 Preparing for and handling a client crisis	TBD online articles	AP-style quiz #1
March 5 Effective social-media writing for PR	Textbook, ch. 6	Mid-term group project due (by March 11, 2018, at 11:59 PM ET*)
March 12 Earned media	Textbook, ch. 8	Discussion-forum questions
March 19 Writing for TV and radio	Textbook, ch. 10	Discussion-forum questions

March 26 Engaging media members	TBD online articles	AP-style quiz #2
April 2 Networking and maintaining media relationships	TBD online article	Discussion-forum questions
April 9	TBD online articles	End-of-term solo project due (by April 9, 2018, at 11:59 PM ET*)

**Plus three-day grace period*