

# PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING

**INSTRUCTOR:** Robert (Rob) Engle; [rengle@jou.ufl.edu](mailto:rengle@jou.ufl.edu); 703/347-3784

**OFFICE HOURS:** Contact me by email anytime or by phone 8 a.m.-8 p.m. M-F. I will try to respond as soon as possible; and in all cases, no longer than 24 hours.

**REQUIRED TEXT:** All readings are assigned (check course website) and AP Stylebook

## **COURSE PREREQUISITE:**

To enroll in this course, you must have completed and received a grade of C or better in PUR 3000 (Principles of Public Relations) and JOU 3101 (Reporting).

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEW:**

The goal of this course is to equip students with the essential skills for developing and writing public relations materials as PR practitioners. Writing effectively in the variety of PR formats is expected and desired by employers.

Using current events and topics, we will cover all areas of public relations writing, including press releases, backgrounders, bios, 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.

In addition, the course will include strategic communication plans, media relations, crisis communication, proposal writing, and speechwriting.

## **COURSE FORMAT:**

For this semester, there are 15 modules. Most weeks will have a writing assignment; four weeks will have quizzes. Participating on the course discussion board will be part of your grade. The course also includes a communication plan final project, where you will incorporate covered PR writing approaches, strategies, tactics, and messaging in a comprehensive plan to inform and persuade key audiences.

All lectures, assignments, discussion items, readings, samples and other instructions are on the course website.

## **GRADING POLICY:**

- Writing Assignments, graded on a 100 point scale - 55 percent
- Communication Plan Final Project - 25 percent
- Quizzes (4) - 10 percent
- Participation on course discussion board - 10 percent

***Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:***

A 94-100 percent

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D+ 67-69

D 63-66

D- 60-62

E 0-59 percent

## **ASSIGNMENT, QUIZ, AND DISCUSSION POLICIES**

All assignments and quizzes (open notes) are due 8 p.m. Sunday on the week of the module -- check assignments and due dates on course website. I will have assignments returned by Thursday of the following week.

You must submit discussion items, at least three to four sentences, by Thursday at 8 p.m. of the module week and respond to two student submissions by Sunday at 8 p.m.

Use AP Stylebook for all writing assignments. If you don't have it, the AP Stylebook can be purchased in hardback or online (<https://www.apstylebook.com/online/>).

### **Attendance and Late Work Policies:**

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.**

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.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

Modules:

1. Welcome, Course Overview
2. The Press Release (Part I)
3. The Press Release (Part II)
4. Press Backgrounder
5. Fact Sheet
6. Bios
7. The Press Kit and Cover/Pitch Letters and Emails
8. Communication Plans
9. Working with Journalists and Editors
10. Social Media Writing
11. Press Advisories
12. Speechwriting
13. Blogs
14. Proposals
15. Crisis Communication
- Final Project - Communication Plan --

## **Weekly Discussions – Details:**

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 8PM (ET) and the minimum **two** meaningful responses are

submitted before **SUNDAY** at 8PM (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.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Less than satisfactory</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Content</b>	Post is appropriate length and includes one original and two reply posts to stimulate further discussion. Information clearly relates to the main topic. Includes supporting links and/or examples. 25 pts	Post and responses are appropriate length, but ideas developed for discussion are minimal or vaguely developed. Information marginally relates to the main topic. No links and/or examples are given. 13 pts	Post is short, does not address topic, and/ or does not develop ideas. - OR – Responses have little or nothing to do with the topic and/or are missing. 5 pts	25
<b>Contribution of original thought</b>	Contribution is thoughtful, analytical, and original. 25 pts	Contribution shows adequate evidence of original thought, but lacks real insight or analysis. 13 pts	Contribution relies on others' posts or lacks original insight into/ shows little understanding of the questions asked. 5 pts	25
<b>Post connects to course materials</b>	Author makes connections between course content and personal reflection, current events, etc. 25 pts	Author makes some connections between course content and personal reflection or current events, but connections are not sufficient or clearly explained. 13 pts	Author does not connect course content to personal reflection or current events. 5 pts	25
<b>Spelling and Grammar</b>	Precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling result in a coherent and intelligible response. 25 pts	Syntax is clear and the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede understanding. 13 pts	Syntax is sometimes garbled and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling disrupt understanding. 5 pts	25
<b>Total points</b>				<b>100</b>

## Assignments - Details:

**Writing Assignments** - We will be using the University of Florida's Brazilian Music Institute (BMI) for the press release, fact sheet, backgrounder, bio, pitch letter, social media, and press advisory assignments, as well as the final project. Other writing assignments include blog entry, speech writing, and proposal. [*Note: More information and instructions regarding assignments and final project can be found on the course website.*]

**Final Project** - For the final project, you will create a communications plan for the BMI to include: Goals/Objectives, Key Audiences, Key Messages, Targeted Media Outlets, Summary, and Evaluation Methods.

**All assignments are due SUNDAY 8 p.m. (ET) on week of the module.** Check the assignment details and due dates in Canvas. I will have graded assignments returned by Thursday of the following week. Comments and edits will be on attached versions of your assignments and/or on the Grade/Comment page on Canvas.

Your writing assignments will be graded on the following criteria: **Topic, Presentation, Writing, and Research & Sourcing.** **Writing Assignments and Final Project Grading Rubric:**

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Less than satisfactory	Points
<b>Topic</b>	Assignment describes, contextualizes, and conceptualizes topic and subject matter in an excellent manner. 25 pts	Assignment adequately covers topic and subject matter but lacks depth and insight. 13 pts	Assignment information inadequately covers and misses the point of topic and subject matter. 5 pts	<b>25 points</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	Message is engaging, compelling, attention getting, comprehensive and easily understandable. The presentation follows style and formatting instructions in lecture PDFs, writing samples, videos and readings. Presents ideas, thoughts, and concepts in a cogent and organized manner. 25 pts	Message made an adequate presentation, but additional effort is needed to make the work more compelling, attention getting and engaging. Piece has some style and formatting issues and needs tighter organization and structure. 13 pts	Presentation is not compelling, attention getting or engaging. It has many style and formatting issues and concepts and ideas are presented in a disorganized and incoherent manner. 5 pts	<b>25 points</b>

<b>Writing</b>	Assignment contains excellent grammar, spelling, punctuation and syntax. Includes descriptive and persuasive language. Piece is factually accurate and utilizes AP style. Ideas, thoughts, and messages are superbly conveyed in the written word. Lead includes the five Ws. 25 pts	Syntax is clear and the relatively few grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors to not impede understanding. Lead is adequate, but piece has some AP style issues. 13 pts	Syntax is sometimes garbled and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling disrupt understanding. Piece has numerous AP style errors and lead is unclear and uninteresting. 5 pts	<b>25 points</b>
<b>Research &amp; Sourcing</b>	Assignment demonstrates excellent research and sourcing, and provides attribution and links to websites and other sources when needed. 25 pts	Assignment demonstrates adequate research and sourcing, but additional attribution may be needed. Links to websites and other sources are provided in an adequate manner. 13 pts	Adequate research, sourcing, attribution is minimal or missing. No links to website and other sources are provided. 5 pts	<b>25 points</b>
Total points				<b>100</b>

### Quizzes:

Quizzes will be on lectures, readings, and videos.

### Weekly Lectures:

A lecture video will be posted to the course website on Canvas for the 15 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.

### University Policies:

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities: Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommo-

dation. 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. University counseling services and mental health services:

### **\*\*Netiquette: Communication Courtesy:**

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. These rules of courtesy for online interactions are often called "Netiquette."

### **Class Demeanor:**

Mastery in this class requires preparation, passion, and professionalism. Students are expected, within the requirements allowed by university policy, to attend class, be on time, 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 to 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 that 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.

### **Getting Help:**

For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu)
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
- [HelpDesk website](#)

\*\*\*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.

Other resources are available from UF Distance Learning for:

- Counseling and Wellness Center
  - 352-392-1575
- Disability resources
- Library
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please 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, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students online at GatorRater.

### **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.

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 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.**

## **College of Journalism and Mass 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.

### **Disclaimer:**

This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go

through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.