

COURSE SYLLABUS

PUR4100: Public Relations Writing
Section 13EG – Class #21361 – Fall 2018

Class Times: Mondays, 8:30 am – 10:25 am (Periods 2-3)
Wednesdays, 10:40 a.m. – 12:35 p.m. (Periods 4 & 5)

Class Location: Weimer 3024

Instructor: Natalie Asorey, nasorey@ufl.edu
2066A Weimer Hall
Office Hours: Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 2pm – 4 pm or 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.

The course will include:

- **Lectures and discussions**, including guest speakers and engaging conversations focused on reading assignments, current news and best-in-class case studies. Reading assignments will be posted online or distributed in class. Students are expected to keep up with the readings and come prepared to discuss these.
- **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.
- **Peer-to-peer collaboration**, like that which is required in the professional world. Select assignments will require interactivity and collaboration among students and peer-to-peer critique.
- **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, but you may find it helpful to do so to gain necessary information to complete assignments for this course.

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. Students should come to class ready to discuss all assigned readings and share their insights, thoughts and questions. 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)
- USB Flash Drive – This will be used to save and back up all writing assignments.

Recommended

- Strunk, William, and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed., Pearson, 2014. (ISBN: 020530902X)
- *The Associated Press Stylebook 2018 and Briefing on Media Law*. The Associated Press, 2018. (ISBN: 0917360672)
- 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:

- Arrive on time and remain in class for its duration unless the instructor allows for early departure.
- Not speak when another student or the instructor are speaking.
- Not use cell phones, laptops, tablets or other electronic devices, except as part of in-class assignments. All cell phones and electronic devices must be set on silent during class time.
- Not eat or drink during class time. A break will be given between periods.

- 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/>.

CLASS ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

The class attendance and late policy is designed to mimic the professional environment. If you miss important meetings or are consistently late, it reflects negatively on your professionalism and commitment. The same will be applied to the classroom.

Class attendance is not required, but missing class will negatively affect your class participation grade. Attendance will be taken every class, except for those designated as working days or one-on-one meeting days.

If you know you will be absent (i.e. due to a religious holiday or extra-curricular, school-related activity), please notify me as early as possible to coordinate making up assignments. Please do not ask me to review material that I covered when you missed class, unless you missed class

due to a serious illness. You may ask your fellow students for class notes and materials at your discretion.

Students are expected to be seated and ready for class by the time class begins. Classes will begin promptly. Any more than two unexcused late arrivals will negatively impact your class participation grade.

Requirements for class attendance, make-up assignments and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.”

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, PDF documents. Your text entry will be in “email”-style and will be accompanied by a file upload, mimicking how you will be submitting materials to your clients or direct reports for review. I will share best practices for submissions in the first weeks of the course.

- Each text entry must include an appropriate subject line.
- Your text entry must also include an email message that requests review and approval of the materials.
- You must add your typed, PDF document as a file upload.

Public relations professionals are often bound by tight, important deadlines and missing these can damage their and their clients’ credibility. Late assignments will not be accepted.

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. 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 a cumulative final exam. The final exam will require short-form responses.
- **AP Style Quizzes (5 percent)** – AP Style quizzes will be given throughout the semester. I will notify you of the topics with which you need to become familiar.
- **Speech and Mock Interview Presentation (10 percent)** – You will select a classmate to serve as your client’s “spokesperson,” and you will write a speech for your partner to deliver. You will also develop an interview brief, including potential Q&A from media. Your partner will deliver the speech, and after, you will act as a journalist and ask him/her pressing questions. You and the person who delivers your speech will share the same grade for this assignment.
- **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 during office hours, one-on-one meetings and working days to answer any questions and provide guidance. A separate rubric will be provided for this project.
- **Class Participation (10 percent)** – Missing class will harm your participation grade, but perfect attendance does not mean you will receive a perfect score. You must be fully present and contribute to discussions to show your understanding of the subject and demonstrate your critical thinking skills. You must also submit your feedback and editing notes to at least five (5) of your classmates’ written assignments.

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. Points are awarded for the Canvas “email” submissions (including subject line and message).

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 visit my office during the scheduled office hours to discuss assignments, materials or other concerns related to the course. Office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus. You may also schedule an appointment with me via email.

I will also be available to answer questions and provide feedback via email. 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.

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/>.