



University of Florida
Department of Public Relations
College of Journalism and Communications
Public Relations Writing
Spring 2021
PUR 4100, Sections 4030 (in person)/4031 (online)
Tuesday/Thursday Period 03-04 (9:35 – 11:30 a.m.)
Classes: Jan. 11 – April 21.
Instructor: Lawrence M. Clark, MBA
Office hours: After class or by appointment
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305-450-1744

Course Description

In this course, you will develop the writing and editing skills necessary to succeed in a public relations career. You will also learn to think critically about current events and how they relate to public relations practice.

According to public relations professionals, two of the most desired traits in new hires are a good business sense (including critical thinking) and excellent writing skills. Thus, practitioners must be polished and capable writers, skilled in diverse forms and styles of writing, and capable of working quickly to meet deadlines. This course is an intensive workshop in *persuasive* public relations writing, which combines lectures as well as in-class and out-of-class writing assignments that will simulate the realities of the professional writing environment for a public relations professional.

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.

Course Goals

The purpose of this class is to teach you effective public relations writing principles and techniques. You will also gain experience in writing for a variety of public relations communication tactics, including news releases, fact sheets, backgrounders, brochures, media pitches and social media. In this course, you will learn writing for public relations requires effective planning, strategic thinking, and good writing.

The goals for this course are:

- 1) To introduce you to **issues management**, so that you begin thinking and behaving like a public relations professional.
- 2) To **explore your writing potential**, building upon principles discussed in class.
- 3) To acclimate you to the **different facets of public relations practice**, giving you a sense of what working in each area is like.
- 4) To help you develop content across **multiple channels and audiences**, and work effectively in this age of media convergence.
- 5) To foster **skills and confidence** that will differentiate you from other applicants when you pursue internships and employment.

Learning Objectives

You will gain valuable experience in writing and editing, as well as monitoring current events, identifying issues, filtering information, making decisions and developing strategy.

Specifically, you will learn to:

- Analyze news, trends and emerging issues with an eye toward possible public relations implications.
- Use research to find reliable sources of information.
- Develop key messages and tailor them to specific audiences to the achievement of strategic public relations objectives.
- Quickly produce clear, concise, well-organized and accurate content, building upon strong key message development.
- Effectively tailor content for multimedia platforms and communication methods.
- Apply reasoning, critical thinking, persuasion and creativity as you move through the writing and editing process.
- Use AP Style, as well as correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Provide constructive feedback to your peers and embrace such feedback in return.
- Develop a final portfolio suitable for a professional job interview. but most of our time will be spent on the daily assignments -writing, re-writing, discussing, etc.

Statement of Inclusion

My intention is always to be fully inclusive of all students and to recognize the strength derived from diversity. I will do my best to see that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives are well served by this course. It is my intent to always be respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture.

Additionally, the audiences for whom we write are also diverse, and we must be considerate of communicative intention and result at all times if we are to be effective communicators.

You will need a Twitter account.

Readings

It's impossible to learn about writing and improve your writing skills without reading topical news and feature writing and watching quality news broadcasts. It's also important to be aware of news, government, history and media. Expect to be a regular reader of newspapers, magazines, specialized publications and websites as well as a listener of radio and television news. *Assigned readings must be read prior to class.*

Text and Reference Materials

There is no text for this class. However, you should either subscribe to AP Stylebook online, or have a hard copy. You will need to use a dictionary often. A good grammar reference is helpful, such as “The Only Grammar Book You’ll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment,” by Susan Thurman. There are also many good online grammar sites. I use www.grammarunited.com

Assignments: Writing

Your writing must align with organizational objectives and public relations strategy: maintain appropriate style, tone and voice; adhere to AP Style and proper grammar and spelling; and demonstrate the core principles of reasoning, critical thinking, persuasion and creativity.

Writing well takes practice. Few students, if any, will start this course writing at an “A” level. Skills will improve as the semester progresses.

Grades are earned, not awarded. In this class, that means you must actively participate, put in the necessary time and effort (both in and outside of class), pay attention to details, and prove that you are committed to delivering quality work. **Remember: spellcheck only checks for misspelling, not appropriate word choice.**

Students who have writing skills problems will be referred to the Reading & Writing Center.

Assignments: Deadlines

All assignments are due by the beginning of class on the due date. If you have a conflict with the deadline, alert me and turn it in early.

Late work policy:

Public relations is a deadline business. All due dates for assignments are final. If an assignment or activity is not received prior to the deadline, a grade of ZERO will be assigned unless PRIOR arrangements are approved by me. If prior arrangements are not possible due to the circumstances of the absence, an excused absence must be requested in writing and documentation provided for verification. If an excused absence is granted, late work may be accepted with penalties assessed for late submission.

Assignments: Portfolio

The final project will encompass the work of the semester:

1. Transmittal Letter to person underwriting the Communications Plan asking for funding. (To be written at end of semester).
2. Communications Plan with:
 - a. Executive summary (two versions: one at start and one at end of semester),
 - b. campaign statement,
 - c. Desired Outcome/goal

- d. target audiences,
- e. SWOT/situation analysis, research
- f. campaign outline,
 - i. objectives,
 - ii. strategies,
 - iii. tactics,
 - iv. timeline for execution of plan,
 - v. campaign budget,
 - vi. evaluation process,
- 3. internal newsletter,
- 4. podcast,
- 5. speech,
- 6. social media posts,

Media kit to include:

- 7. Professional bio,
- 8. backgrounder/fact sheet,
- 9. news releases,
- 10. boilerplate,
- 11. pitches,
- 12. feature article,
- 13. CEO op-ed.

General Course Policies

Absences

Each student is allowed two excused absences for the semester without penalty to the final attendance point total. Absences beyond TWO—for any reason—will result in a reduction of the course grade by 1/3 of a letter grade (for each additional class absence) or failure of the class. Students are responsible for any information missed during an absence. Click here to read the university attendance policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

If you have a valid and unavoidable reason for missing class, you will need to provide me with proper documentation (e.g., a doctor's note or hospitalization record) for your absence on your first day back.

Excused absences include:

Religious holidays (only the holiday).

Documented, dated, necessary medical excuse or official documented legal excuse (a dated doctor's note or prescription). The Student Health Center will provide you a specific kind of note that indicates they think you should've missed class or will need to miss additional days.

University competitive events (that means athletes).

Situations that are NOT considered excused absences include: social events, meetings, entertaining out-of-town guests, holiday/travel plans, weddings, etc.

Grading

Graded Course Components

Participation and Professor's evaluation — 10%.

- Listen actively to the instructor and your fellow students, and make meaningful contributions to class discussion. Be thoughtful and instructive when editing the work of fellow classmates.

Assignments — 30%

- Most weeks, you will complete an individual writing assignment related to the week's topic(s). Each writing assignment must be submitted by the established deadline. Your corrected version will be used for your final portfolio.

Quizzes — 10%

Quizzes will be given to assess mastery of key principles. Most quizzes will draw from the assigned readings and class discussions. In addition, a few AP Style questions will be included. This provides a great opportunity to use the AP Stylebook and increase your confidence in editing copy.

Final Portfolio (Communications Plan & Media Kit) — 50%

This will involve finalizing several individual assignments from the semester, compiling all of this work into a professional portfolio. **Final letter grades will be assigned based on your final point total at the end of the semester.**

Letter Grade	C+
100 Scale (100%)	76-79.9
A	C
92-100	72-75.9
A-	C-
90-91.9	70-71.9
B+	D+
87-89.9	66-69.9
B	D
82-86.9	60-65.9
B-	E
80-81.9	Below 60

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Please read more information on academic dishonesty at <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

Policy on Covid-19

We will have face-to-face instructional sessions to accomplish the student learning objectives of this course. In response to COVID-19, the following policies and requirements are in place to maintain your learning environment and to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions.

- You are required to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings. Following and enforcing these policies and requirements are all of our responsibility. Failure to do so will lead to a report to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.
- This course has been assigned a physical classroom with enough capacity to maintain physical distancing (6 feet between individuals) requirements. Please utilize designated seats and maintain appropriate spacing between students. Please do not move desks or stations.
- Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.
- Follow your instructor's guidance on how to enter and exit the classroom. Practice physical distancing to the extent possible when entering and exiting the classroom.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms](#).
 - Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies](#).

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center by providing appropriate documentation. (352-392-8565), [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to me when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Religious Holy Days

By UF policy, a student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day must notify me of his or her pending absence prior to the date of a religious holy day, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment or activity within a reasonable time after the absence.

Online Course Evaluation

Feedback is a gift. 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 2-3 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>.

Class Privacy Issues

Our class sessions may be audio visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited. For resolving technical issues [visit the helpdesk website](#) or call 352-392-4357.

Tentative Nature of the Syllabus

I reserve the right to change and/or add readings throughout the semester. Furthermore, I reserve the right to change and or move around scheduled lectures in order to facilitate for potential unplanned events (cancellations or guest speakers). If changes in the schedule are necessary, students will be held responsible for such changes, which **will be announced in class** ahead of time.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1

1/12 Introduction to course and each other; syllabus review: course goals. PR is not journalism, BUT... reporting vs writing for PR. Introduction to AP style. Writing homework: professional and personal biographies.

Week 2

1/19 Comma Rules, importance of accurate grammar, spelling, facts. Grammar review. Planning, SWOT, SMART. Ethics.

Week 3

1/26 You will choose a company and act as a public relations specialist for this company for the duration of class. Assignments will be geared toward your chosen company. You will end the semester with a portfolio of work, including a communications plan and media kit introducing a new product or service for your organization.

Internal Communication Assignment: Company backgrounder (Not a rehash of your company's current profile).

Week 4

2/2 Identify PR (campaign) challenge. SWOT analysis of your company.

Week 5

2/9 Research, planning, programs, campaigns and measurement. Use the SWOT analysis of your company to finalize a challenge facing your organization. Draft a brief plan on how you would recommend facing the challenge. This will be the basis for the new product or service you create for your communications plan and media kit.

Week 6

2/16 Persuasive writing, POV, advocacy.

Internal Communication Assignment:

Draft a newsletter article for your company's employee magazine introducing the challenge and solution you identified last week:

Week 7

2/23 External communications: finding and exploiting news opportunities. Identify 10 topics and a key message for each topic. Identify the target audience for each message. What tactic would you use for each?

Create boiler plate for your company.

Week 8

3/2 News releases: write two, using different angles (trade and Finance), identifying target audiences and media.

Week 9

3/9 Pitching: write three different pitches aimed at three different media targets. Research the intended reporters and bloggers. Pitches can be by phone, email, tweet or YouTube.

Week 10

3/16 Media kits: content, purpose. Write a feature article introducing your new product or service. Research publications so you target the correct one and its reporter. Identify key messages.

Week 11

3/23 Writing for external social and other digital media. Write: Podcast.

Week 12

3/30 Writing for social and other digital media. Write campaign social media posts.

Week 13

4/6 Write Op-ed, 600 words exactly. Identify media outlet for placement.

Week 14

4/13 Putting it all together: Communications Plan — Objectives, Target Audiences, Strategies, Tactics, Timeline, Budget, Evaluation.

Week 15

4/20 Campaign portfolio due. **Last day of class**

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via email at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Campus Health and Wellness Resources

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).