PUR4100: Public Relations Writing

Spring 2024

Monday, 10:40 a.m.-12:35 p.m. & Wednesday, 10:40 a.m.-12:35 p.m. ET

Instructor: Kera Felton
Email: jakera.felton@ufl.edu
Phone: 478.244.5355
Credits: 4
Office Hours: By appointment, book here

Emails: Please email me in Outlook. My email address is jakera.felton@gmail.com. I do not respond to emails in Canvas.

Class Meeting Zoom Link

Meeting ID: 961 7946 1495

Online Course Administration

e-Learning in Canvas http://elearning.ufl.edu/ will be used to administer the course communication, materials, and grades.

Availability

Please feel free to speak with me during the semester about any questions or concerns you have. You can also reach me by email and I'll do my best to get back to you within 24 hours. If it's urgent, you may text me, but please try not to text after 8 p.m.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Writing is essential to a successful career in public relations. Clients, corporate leaders, media and audiences will rely on your ability to write polished, clear communication quickly. You will need to adapt your writing style to changing environments, audiences and materials. Becoming an outstanding writer will make your PR services invaluable and help you succeed in 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:
- **Warm ups**
- **Benchmarks**
- **AP Style Quizzes**
- **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 editing.
- A **strategic communications plan & media kit project** for a client of your choice. You will have the opportunity to imagine a new client product, service, initiative, brand or similar. 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.
  - *NOTE: Because the client will have its own existing messaging, please carefully review the Academic Honesty portion of the syllabus. It is critical to your success in this class that you're careful not to use existing messaging or content beyond the basic elements of the client's brand.*

The professor reserves the right to make adjustments to this list as appropriate.

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 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 Text (also available online):
- The Associated Press Stylebook 2018 and Briefing on Media Law. The Associated Press, 2018. (ISBN: 0917360672)

Suggested Resources:
- 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.
- 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.

Useful Web Sites

- PRWeek
- Links to an external site.
- PRovoke
- IPR Research Letter
- Links to an external site.
- PRNEWS
- Links to an external site.

COURSE PROFESSIONALISM

The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school, and students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Carefully consider how you participate and the assignments you submit. You can use humor and demonstrate creativity; in fact, I encourage it. But just as we do with client work, always think ahead to how it will reflect on you. Use your best professional judgment.

IMPORTANT: Students are expected to arrive on time via Zoom, not leave early, and wait for the class to end before signing off. Please keep your Zoom screens on for the majority of class, unless you need to briefly leave your computer or arrange to have it off ahead of time. Please note that continually keeping your screen off is unprofessional and will negatively impact your class participation grade. In the event of an emergency, notify me at the start of class.

Discussion Demeanor: I want this class to be fun and energetic with great discussions, and we may cover sensitive topics and ones about which some students will have diverse opinions or may have strong feelings. Therefore, I expect you to be courteous and respectful to your fellow classmates. Please be polite to others while both expressing opinions and responding to them. *Any form of disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.*

CLASS ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

I believe professionals should be treated like adults because we *are* adults. The same is true of UF students. Life happens, and if anyone understands that, it's this professor! However, in your professional career, consistently missing or arriving late to or leaving early from work, meetings or client events will reflect poorly on your professionalism and commitment. As such, the same will be applied to our class via Zoom.

Class attendance is required as part of your participation grade. ***Three (3) absences will be excused*** before it affects your grade and you will have ***two (2) unexcused absences***. Attendance will be taken every class, unless otherwise noted. If you know you will be absent (e.g., due to a religious holiday or extra-curricular/school-related activity), please notify me as early as possible to coordinate making up assignments.

Classes will begin promptly. ***Any more than two (2) unexcused late arrivals will negatively impact your final grade. Five minutes (10:50 a.m.) will be considered "late."*** Punctuality is particularly important in an online class so we can begin on time. However, if you know you will be late and notify me ahead of time so we don't wait on you, I will take it into consideration.

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

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 attribution. You will choose a client and build messages for them throughout the semester, which will require you to examine their real-world messaging. You might be tempted to use their existing content. ***RESIST THE TEMPTATION!*** We will discuss in class how to create your own original messaging and content in a way that fits the client's brand but does not plagiarize.
- You must cite sources for and use quotes around anything used word-for-word from any source. This includes organizations' or companies' websites, internal documents and materials.
    - Please note that source "citations" in PR are not the same as in MLA, Chicago Style or other academic citations. We will discuss in class.
- All work submitted must be original work for this course.
- Plagiarizing another student's work or having another student complete the assignment for you is considered academic dishonesty.

Any incident of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the UF Honor Code, which 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 You may review the Student Conduct & Honor Codes here: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/

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 me.

Dates and assignments are subject to change but will always be done with plenty of notice, and always to your benefit. In other words, changes will give you more time to complete the work, not less. All changes will be sent through Canvas as Announcements and/or emails and will be updated in the Canvas syllabus.

- ***Everything you write for this course must be thoughtful, coherent and carefully edited.*** Misspellings, syntax and grammatical errors are

unacceptable, particularly for PR students. These errors will affect your grade considerably. AP Style guidelines should be followed for all materials.

- ***Students will submit all writing assignments as typed shareable links through Canvas***.   You must use the assigned Google Doc folder for all writing assignments. If you lose the link, please let me know. This is important because I use the "Tracked Changes" feature to show edits and offer feedback through comments as part of the grading process, I cannot accept PDFs.

All assignments are due at 11:59 on their assigned due dates (which is usually on a Sunday).

GRADING POLICY

Obviously PUR4100 – PR Writing requires a significant amount of writing. As a PR professional still active in the field, I believe one of the best ways I can help my students hone their writing skills is through extensive editing. I provide incredibly detailed edits and feedback on every assignment. As such, grades will often take longer to return. If your next assignment requires the feedback from the current assignment, I always move back the deadlines.

Your grade will be determined by performance on writing assignments throughout the semester and your final project. 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

Although every writer has their own style, there are certain objective edits all PR professionals should train themselves to make. These include, but are not limited to:

- AP Style errors
- Punctuation and grammar errors
- Fact errors
- Passive voice errors

Other edits, while not quite objective, will become easier to spot:

- Sentences that should be tightened
- Awkward phrasing
- Lack of clarity, whether in phrasing or concept
- Jargon

Grading Peer Editing Assignments: To the best of your ability, you will revise and offer constructive feedback on your partner's paper. You will show your edits using the Tracked Changes/Suggested Edits features of Word, Google Docs, SharePoint, etc.

Editing Focus: For most of the peer editing assignments, I will select a specific "Editing Focus" on which you should focus your edits. For example, in one assignment, you will edit any incorrect punctuation or grammar in your partner's work. In another assignment, you will look for AP Style errors. Missed edits that fall under the assigned Editing Focus will be docked one (1) point each.

Each writer, assignment and editing need is quite different. Some assignments require little editing, while others need a considerable amount. As such, except for the assignment's Editing Focus, I will not take points off for each missed/incorrect edit. I will grade based on the overall effort in spotting and correctly editing.