

**PUR 4100 X3957 – SPRING 2013
PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING SYLLABUS**

“Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.”
---Benjamin Franklin

Instructor: Ms. Jorie Scholnik, M.Ed., Ed.S., NCC
Adjunct Professor, Department of Public Relations

Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays, Periods 5-6 (11:45 a.m. – 1:40 p.m.)
3028 Weimer Hall

Office Hours: 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Mondays and Wednesdays
3059 Weimer Hall

Other times may be available by appointment. You can always speak with me for a few minutes after class. If you know in advance that you will be stopping by my office, please let me know via email so I do not make another appointment at that time. I want all of you to receive the individual attention that you deserve!

Email (preferred contact): jscholnik@gmail.com

Please allow 24 hours for a response time. I genuinely want to help my students, but I do eat, sleep and watch Gator sporting events!

Twitter: @JorieScholnik

I recommend emailing me with your questions and concerns. If your classmates can benefit from your question, and you can keep it to 140 characters or less, then tweet to #SchPRUF. Using the same hashtag, I will retweet any current event articles related to our class that you post. I suggest using TweetDeck to monitor the hashtag so you can stay involved!

Required Course Materials:

Wilcox, D.L. & Reber, B.H. (2013). *Public relations writing and media techniques* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson (ISBN: 0-205-56263-9)

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (recent edition)

Supplemental readings may be supplied or read online throughout the course.

Please purchase a reliable flash drive to save your work on during the semester. The hard drives on the computers in the lab are not dependable. You will need to bring this to every class meeting. Unfortunately, if you lose your work, it won't be considered a valid excuse.

Optional Course Materials:

Dictionary and Thesaurus
 Binder to store notes, class handouts and writing samples
 UF Planner
 Stapler

Course Website:

<http://lss.at.ufl.edu> (Sakai)

For assistance with technical difficulties in Sakai, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- Learning-support@ufl.edu
 - (352) 392-4357 - select option 2
 - <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>
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Prerequisites:

In order to enroll in this course, you must have received a grade of C or better in PUR 3000 (Principles of Public Relations) and JOU 3101 (Reporting). Proficiency in word processing is also required. Familiarity with visual design is helpful as well, but not necessary.

Course Description (4 credits):

The purpose of this course is for students to develop the writing and editing skills necessary to succeed in a public relations career. Students will generate public relations materials in a variety of formats, including fact sheets, news releases, brochures, blogs, position papers and others for an existing business or organization in the community. Students completing effective, strategy-based copy for a wide range of tactics will meet clients' needs for persuasive, professional public relations writing skills. This course is also designed to have students think critically about current events and how they relate to public relations practice.

Course Goals:

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 provide a safe environment in which you can explore your writing potential, building upon principles discussed in class.
- 3) To help you develop content across multiple channels and audiences, and work effectively in this age of media convergence.
- 4) 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, after successfully completing this course, you will have learned to:

- ✓ Analyze news, trends and emerging issues with an eye toward potential public relations implications.
- ✓ Use research to find reliable sources of information.
- ✓ Develop key messages and tailor them to specific audiences and organizational objectives.
- ✓ Quickly produce clear, concise, well-organized and accurate content, building upon strong key message development.
- ✓ Demonstrate an understanding of the role of public relations writing in the strategic planning process.
- ✓ 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.

The course specifically supports eight of the 11 professional values and competencies required of graduates by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC):

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to public relations
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles, and work ethically;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by appropriate methods;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the public relations profession.
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for public relations.

Course Format/Instructional Method:

This course is very learner-friendly, and you will learn by writing. Each class session will feature some lesson from the instructor, but most of our time will be spent on the daily assignments – discussing writing principles, evaluating and analyzing the writing strategies used in different tactics, editing each other’s work, and writing, writing, re-writing. We’ll follow the book as a guide, reference and point of departure. The success of this class will depend on your engagement and participation, as well as your commitment to completing assignments before each class period. If you come prepared, then your comments and insights will improve class discussion and the work of your classmates. Assigned readings should be completed prior to class.

Critical Dates:

Drop/Add: January 7-11

Late Registration: January 7-11

Holiday – MLK Day – January 21

Withdrawal, All Courses, with 25% Refund – February 1

Spring Break – March 2-9

Withdrawal from UF Without Failing Grades (W assigned) – April 12

Classes End – April 24

Course Policies:**Attendance:**

Attendance is required. Absence from class is not in your best interest. Quizzes are unannounced. You are responsible for all material covered in class, including readings, class discussions, video presentations, and any other material covered. Students missing class must obtain notes from another student; notes are not available from the instructor.

Being on time for class is as important as attending class.

Having more than 2 absences is considered excessive, no matter the reason. Being more than 15 minutes late is considered an automatic absence. You are not required to justify the first two absences, but you have to turn in missed writing exercises that same week (by Friday at midnight). If you miss 3 classes, you will receive a deduction of -5% on your final class average. Thus, for example, a person who has an 80% (B) average but has missed 3 meetings would receive a 75% (C+) grade for the semester. If you miss 4 or more classes you will receive a deduction of -15% on your final class average.

After the first two absences, no late assignments will be accepted. If a major component of your grade is due that day in class (writing samples portfolio), you must get it to me before the start time of class to receive credit.

Please practice professional courtesy and send me an email before the start of class to let me know that you will not be attending.

Makeup & Late Work:

Reputations are made on the ability to meet deadlines. Dates for assignments, tests, and presentations have been announced in advance in the "Weekly Course Schedule" so that you can plan other activities around these deadlines. If you must use your first 2 absences, you need to submit the writing assignments missed in class before the end of the week (Friday at midnight). However, quizzes cannot be administered after they've been distributed unless prior arrangements have been made with me (**no exceptions**). Large assignments always need to be received before the deadline. If you know you are going to be absent, here are two options: (1) Include your assignment as an attachment to your email letting me know you will be missing class and/or (2) send a hard copy of the assignment to class with a responsible classmate. **No extra credit will be given for additional work.**

Computer Lab:

Please do not eat in the computer lab. You may bring in water, but your bottle needs to be kept on the floor.

Expectation of professionalism:

It is my expectation that we will treat each other as professionals during our time together in class. We only have two hours together every class period, and your engagement during those two hours is necessary for the success of the class as a whole.

These are some behaviors that correspond with my expectations:

- **Cellphones must be turned off during class** (unless you are on the National Organ Transplant waiting list – in which case, vibrate would apply)
- Don't disrupt the class by whispering, texting, surfing the web, passing notes, etc.
- Pack to leave AFTER I dismiss class
- Stay awake and don't read the newspaper in class
- Meet me in-person if you have grade-related questions or are having problems. The middle of a lecture is not an appropriate time to ask why you got a C on the last assignment.

- Email inquiries should be limited to questions that are not answered elsewhere (e.g, the syllabus). This is a writing class, so formal composition and clear, concise writing are expected. Plan ahead to wait for a response time
- Laptops should ONLY be for taking notes during class.

UF 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.

Inclusiveness: Every attempt is made to make all courses non-sexist, diverse and multicultural in content. Please visit with me should you feel this goal is not being met.

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 which is located at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php>.

Academic Honesty:

Integrity is a cornerstone of higher education. Integrity is also one of the values our class is based on. Dave Ellis, the author of *“Becoming a Master Student,”* defines integrity as keeping a promise. In this class you are asked to keep the promise of doing your own work. You are required to read and sign a copy of this Academic Integrity Agreement, which will be returned to me. The University of Florida has a Student Conduct Code that clearly defines cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of dishonest conduct. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of behavior that constitutes academic dishonesty. Please review the code here: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>.

What is considered academic dishonesty in this course?

- Plagiarism (literary or artistic theft). This includes the use of materials from another author without citation or attribution.
- Extensive use of verbatim materials from another author *with* citation and attribution
- Having someone else do your work for you
- Copying a classmate’s work
- Using your own writing from internship experiences, past assignments or from assignments in other classes (also known as “double dipping”)

The University of Florida Honor Code was voted on and passed by the Student Body in the Fall of 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.

Honor Pledges:

“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.”

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."

Grading Philosophy:

Writing well takes practice and your 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 inside 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 are experiencing difficulties with their writing skills will be referred to the Reading & Writing Center.

Seek clarity. Take ownership of your performance. If you don't understand something, let me know. The same holds true if you are concerned about your progress. Please talk with me at any point in the semester. I will gladly help you.

Grading Scale:

A	(93-100)
A-	(90-92)
B+	(88-89)
B	(83-87)
B-	(80-82)
C+	(78-79)
C	(73-77)
C-	(70-72)
D+	(68-69)
D	(60-67)
E	(59 and below)

UF Grading Policy Information:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

<http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

A note about mechanics and fact errors: Your writing will be evaluated for content, format, appropriateness, grammar, syntax, spelling, and most importantly, by achievement of behavioral goals. Unless otherwise specified, WE WILL USE AP STYLE ON ALL ASSIGNMENTS. Do not assume you will remember everything from earlier courses. This is required not to torture you, but to help you prepare for what is expected of you in a professional setting.

- Misuse of commas, semicolons, colons, etc.: -5

- Spelling errors: -10
- AP Style errors: -10
- Factual errors: -20 (Please note that there should be no factual errors. Ever. Period.)

A major factual error is defined as one that gives the wrong information to the audience, including such things as misspelling the client's name, incorrect identification of key sources, or having the wrong place and time for an upcoming event.

A note about paraphrasing: When completing any of your writing assignments for this class, it is important to clearly attribute where you obtained your information from, whether it's a website or an organization's internal document. You CANNOT copy anything word-for-word from any source without putting quotes around it, even if it is given to you from the organization that is your client.

On a related note, a hypothetical case does not mean you can create quotes. Quotes will be provided when needed for assignments.

Graded Assignments:

Participation	5%
Pop Quizzes	10%
Client Presentations	15%
Writing Samples	30%
Portfolio Interview	5%
Final Client Media Kit	35%

TOTAL	100%

Assignment Descriptions:

Course Readings:

It is impossible to learn about writing and improve your writing skills without reading topical news and feature writing. Expect to be a regular reader of newspapers, magazines, specialized publications and websites. All students are also expected to read assigned textbook readings prior to the start time of class.

Participation (5%): Listen actively to the instructor and your fellow students, and make meaningful contributions to class discussion. Complete class activities, peer edits and writing assignments. **You will also take turn as discussion leaders (more guidance will be provided on this).**

Pop Quizzes (10%):

Seven unannounced quizzes will be given to assess your 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.

Client Presentations (15%):

You will give two presentations on aspects of working with your client in the community. The first presentation will focus on your pitch to the client based on your research and strategic goals. The second presentation will cover the tactics you developed, your strategy and how you were effective. **More details will be provided in class.**

Writing Samples (30%):

There will be two sets of graded writing assignments in this class. Some of these assignments will be used in your final media kit for this class. These assignments will also prepare you for entry-level employment in the public relations industry.

Writing Samples – Set 1

Resume and Cover Letter
Video Resume Script
Biography
Twitter log
Pitch/Proposal
Memo
Situation Analysis/Strategic Plan

Writing Samples – Set 2 (*see portfolio interview assignment)

News Release
Feature
Newsletter
Brochure
PSA
Event
Crisis Communication

Portfolio Interview (5%): On the day your second writing samples are due, you will submit your portfolio in a simulated job interview. This will give you practice explaining your work and presenting yourself as a strategic public relations specialist. **Further guidance will be provided later in the semester.**

Final Client Media Kit (35%):

Throughout the semester, you will produce a media kit for a real client. You will need to meet with a high-level employee or member of the organization to explain that you have an interest in developing informational materials for them, free of charge, as part of the final project for this course. (One of the course writing assignments will help you with this task). You should explain to the client that you will research the organization's public relations needs and produce a wide variety of written communications tactics for the client. These tactics should be directed toward the accomplishment of your client's public relations goals.

I will provide the class with a few clients, but here are some ideas to help you identify other options for this semester:

- The UF Student Government has a list of dozens of students associations at UF: <https://www.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu/>
- Volunteer Match has a list of Gainesville community non-profits: <http://www.volunteermatch.org/search/orgs.jsp?r=msa&l=32694> .
- The Gainesville Chamber of Commerce: <http://www.gceo.com/>
- Florida Public Relations Association: <http://fpragainesville.com/>
- Alachua County: <http://www.alachuacounty.us/Pages/AlachuaCounty.aspx>

A formal assignment description for the media kit will be provided during the semester.

Extra Credit:

Get published as a guest blogger or ghost tweet for the semester! **More details will be provided in class.**

Final Notes:

This is an intense course, but the end is infinitely rewarding. The work is cumulative, so if you are having difficulty with a particular concept or assignment, please see me immediately so you do not continue to struggle through the final project. I strive for an “open door” policy, and am available via email to help.

I reserve the right to make changes, if necessary, to the grading system and schedule for this class.

Course Schedule:

Readings should be completed PRIOR to the day we are covering the related information.

Disclaimer:

The following dates and discussion topics are a good-faith attempt at providing you with a tentative course schedule, but please note that they are subject to change. Plans may need to change to further the understanding of the course materials by the students or to accommodate a guest speaker’s schedule. Should it become necessary to make any changes in the above, your instructor will notify the class in advance. If you are not in attendance, it is considered your responsibility to learn what was missed and/or announced.

Week 1

1/7: Syllabus, Introductions, Student Profile

1/9: Resumes and Cover Letters

Week 2

1/14: Video Resume Scripts, Professional Biographies

1/16: LinkedIn, Twitter

Week 3

1/21: NO CLASS – MLK Day

1/23: Ch. 1 – Framework of PR Writing, Creativity, Research

Week 4

1/28: Ch. 2 – Audiences, Sources

1/30: Guest Speakers – clients in the community

Week 5

2/4: Ch. 18 – Planning Programs and Campaigns

2/6: Ch. 19 – Measuring Success

Week 6

2/11: Ch. 6 – Pitches, Ch. 14 – Proposals

2/13: Ch. 14 – Emails, Memos, Letters

Week 7

2/18: Ch. 15 – Giving Speeches and Presentations

2/20: **First Client Presentation – Day 1, Writing Samples – Set One Due**

Week 8

2/25: **First Client Presentation – Day 2**

2/27: Ch. 12 – Social Media and Blogging

Week 9

3/4: NO CLASS – Spring Break! (Get caught up on readings if needed)

3/6: NO CLASS – Spring Break! (Get caught up on readings if needed)

Week 10

3/11: Ch. 4 – Working with journalists and bloggers, Ch. 10 – Distribution, Ch. 5 – News Releases

3/13: Ch. 6 – Fact Sheets, Advisories, Spotlight: public relations professionals

Week 11

3/18: White Papers/Position Statements, Backgrounders

3/20: Ch. 7 – News Features and Op-Eds

Week 12

3/25: Ch. 13 – Newsletters and Brochures

3/27: Ch. 9 – Radio, TV, Public Service Announcements; Ch. 16 – Direct Mail and Advertising

Week 13

4/1: Ch. 17 – Meetings & Events

4/3: Annual Reports, Crisis Communication

Week 14

4/8: **Individual Meetings – Portfolio Interviews, Writing Samples – Set Two Due**

4/10: **Individual Meetings – Portfolio Interviews, Writing Samples – Set Two Due**

Week 15

4/15: Work Day

4/17: Work Day

Week 16

4/22: **Second Client Presentation – Day 1, FINAL MEDIA KITS DUE**

4/24: **Second Client Presentation – Day 2**