

**PUR 4100 X1557 – SPRING 2014
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: Tuesdays and Thursdays, Periods 5-6 (11:45 a.m. – 1:40 p.m.)
3028 Weimer Hall

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:45 – 4:45 p.m.
3059 Weimer Hall

Other times may be available by appointment. You can always speak with me for a few minutes before/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 a full 24 hours on weekdays for a response. I will try my best to return emails sent over the weekend, but plan on any email sent after 4 p.m. on Friday to be returned on Monday. Please do not email me through Sakai.

Twitter: @JorieScholnik, Class hashtag: #SchPRUF

I use email to answer your questions and concerns. The hashtag can be used to share any articles of interest related to the class (or really any information that would benefit everyone as writers). 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.

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 learner-centered, and you will learn by writing. Each class session will feature some lesson from the instructor, but most of our time will be spent actively engaging with each other – 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.

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 two 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 Sunday at 11:55 p.m.). If you miss three 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 five or more classes you will receive a deduction of -15% on your final class average.

After the first two absences, no in-class assignments will be accepted. If a major component of your grade is due that day in class (e.g., writing samples), 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. All due dates 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 two absences, you need to submit the writing assignments missed in class before the end of the week (Sunday at 11:55 p.m.).

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. Basically, no late work will be accepted for large assignments.

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 writing activities. Plan to take notes by hand.**

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.

- Grammar errors (like the 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.

Class Project:

To give your writing more direction, we will be working with real-world clients this semester. The ultimate goal is to simulate a real-world public relations experience by having the class work in teams of two to understand a client's goals and then create strategic writing assignments. At the end of the course, you will submit a final media kit to your client, which will also serve as an excellent portfolio piece upon graduation of the program.

Graded Assignments:

Participation	8%
Pop Quizzes	10%
In-Class Writing Activities	10%
Client Presentations	12%
Writing Sets	30%
Portfolio Interview	10%
Final Client Media Kit	20%

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. Additional required readings may be assigned as the semester progresses (posted on Sakai or distributed in class).

Participation (8%): Listen actively to the instructor and your fellow students, and make meaningful contributions to class discussion. Complete class activities, peer edits and writing assignments. Cell phone is off.

You will also be a discussion leader for one class period (4% within this grade category).

Expectations of a discussion leader: Briefly summarize the writing tactic that you will be leading a discussion on during class. Remember, the instructor will also present on this topic and your classmates are responsible for the readings so this shouldn't take up much time. The main component will be findings two examples of your writing tactic. Be prepared to share what you noticed about the writing tactic through these examples, what you liked, what could be a challenge, etc. Also come prepared to ask the class questions that further the discussion* on this topic.

*Students should be prepared to assist the discussion leader by engaging in this conversation.

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.

In-Class Writing Activities (10%):

We will be doing a lot of writing in this class! During certain class periods, there will be in-class writing activities that I will collect. Usually, these are graded based on effort in pass/fail format. If there is a more formal in-class writing assignment where I will be giving you a letter grade, I will notify you in advance (even though that doesn't necessarily mean that you will get a prompt in advance). An example of this would be ghost writing a speech for another student group's client.

Client Presentations (12%):

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 Sets (30%):

This is the heart of the course. There will be two sets of graded writing assignments in this class. Most of these assignments will be edited and then used in your final media kit. These assignments will also prepare you for entry-level employment in the public relations industry. **For each writing set, the instructor will provide a list of writing tactics along with a detailed assignment description for each one.** Note that the topics of each tactic will vary based on your client.

My advice: Pace yourself. We will go over the tactics in class and hopefully there will be some class time to work on these assignments, but I'm trusting you to use good time management skills.

Writing Set One: Memo, Pitch, Proposal, Social Media, Blog

Writing Set Two: Fact Sheet, Newsletter, Brochure, PSA, Crisis Communication

Portfolio Interview (10%): You will craft a resume, cover letter, video resume script and professional biography. During your assigned interview time (during a normal class period), you will submit these materials and come prepared to answer some common public relations interview questions. The instructor will provide you with a list of questions in advance, and you will need a typed response to a select number. 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 (20%):

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.

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! The blog can't be associated with any current or previous place of employment.

Maintain a professional Twitter log for eight weeks of the semester. A detailed handout will be provided that talks about requirements for who to follow, how many tweets to create, etc.

Final Notes:

This is an intense course, but the end is extremely 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: Ch. 1 – Framework of PR Writing, Creativity, Research

Week 2

1/14: Ch. 2 – Persuasive Writing, Audiences, Sources, Ch. 3 – Finding and Making News

1/16: Ch. 14 – Emails, Memos, Letters

Week 3

1/21: Ch. 6 – Pitches

1/23: Ch. 14 – Proposals

Week 4

1/28: Ch. 18 – Planning Programs and Campaigns

1/30: Ch. 19 – Measuring Success

Week 5

2/4: Ch. 15 – Giving Speeches and Presentations

2/6: In-Class Writing Activity, Work Day (time permitting)

Week 6

2/11: Ch. 17 – Meetings & Events, Ch. 4 – Working with journalists and bloggers, Ch. 10 – Distribution, Possible guest speaker – photo captions

2/13: Ch. 12 – Social Media and Blogging (included: LinkedIn, Twitter)

Week 7

2/18: First Client Presentation – Day 1

2/20: First Client Presentation – Day 2

Week 8

2/25: Ch. 6 – Fact Sheets, Advisories, Spotlight: public relations professionals, **Writing Samples – Set One Due**

2/27 Ch. 13 – Newsletters and Brochures

Week 9

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

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

Week 10

3/11: Ch. 5 – News Releases

3/13: In-Class Writing Activity, Work Day (time permitting)

Week 11

3/18: Ch. 7 – News Features and Op-Eds

3/20: In-Class Writing Activity, Work Day (time permitting)

Week 12

3/25: Ch. 9 – Radio, TV, Public Service Announcements

3/27: Annual Reports, Crisis Communication

Week 13

4/1: White Papers/Position Statements, Backgrounders, **Writing Samples – Set Two Due**

4/3: Resumes and Cover Letters

Week 14

4/8: Video Resume Scripts, Professional Biographies

4/10: Work Day

Week 15

4/15: Individual Meetings – Portfolio Interviews

4/17: Individual Meetings – Portfolio Interviews

Week 16

4/22: Second Client Presentation – FINAL MEDIA KITS DUE

Online course evaluation process: 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 at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.