

PUR 4100: PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING

Course Syllabus – Fall 2012

Monday/Wednesday, Section 4071, Periods 4 & 5 (10:40 am to 12:35 pm)

WEIMER 2056

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Office Hours: Tuesday – 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm
Wednesday – 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
or by pre-scheduled appointment

Appointments. Please visit the office during designated office hours to discuss assignments, class-related materials, or any other academic concern. Or, schedule an alternate appointment with the professor by e-mail.

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

Purpose & Course Description. This course is an intensive workshop in public relations writing that is diverse in style, ranging from brief public service announcements to online news releases to persuasive speeches and executive presentations. Since most formal organizational communications begin or intersect with the written word, **most practitioners see writing as the foundation of professional public relations practice.** Thus, practitioners must be polished and capable writers, skilled in diverse forms and styles of writing and capable of working quickly. In the course, you will learn to generate public relations materials in a variety of formats, including backgrounders, fact sheets, news releases, brochures, position papers, speeches, etc. for real clients. This course will be a combination of discussions along with in-class and out-of-class writing assignments that will simulate the realities of the professional writing environment faced by a public relations professional.

This learner-centered course will primarily use class discussion and hands-on instruction to engage in the learning process. We will rarely simply recount what is stated in the readings, but rather use them as a springboard for expanded discussion. We will emphasize *interactivity* and *collaboration* and classes will move in a seminar format much like the collaborations that operate in the professional world. This course is outcomes-based, and you will be evaluated primarily on your ability to transfer the theory and knowledge shared in class into workable documents. Some of our class time will involve you working

independently with the professor circulating to assist you on a one-on-one or group basis. Because we are covering a wide variety of materials, it is **essential that you keep up with the reading schedule and come to each class with the assigned reading's concepts in your memory and in your written reading notes.**

Course Objectives. The primary objective of this course is to master the basic writing skills of the public relations professional, both in terms of style and content. Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able:

- To recognize the critical role of excellent writing in the public relations process
- To relate strategic objectives to the creation of public relations documents for strategic communication purposes
- To become competent in writing clear, concise materials that are accurate, logically organized and use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- To create public relations material appropriate for diverse audiences and situations
- To recognize the value of technology and its impact on public relations writing and practice
- To produce on deadline any number of written public relations formats or genres.

Required Text & Materials. There are two required texts and recommended resources:

Wilcox, D. L. *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques* (7th Edition), Boston: Pearson Education, Inc./Allyn and Bacon, 2010.

Kessler, Lauren and Duncan McDonald, *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style* (7th Edition), Boston: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2008.

Associated Press Stylebook, 2007 or more recent edition

A reliable thumb drive/flash drive/memory stick or a reliable external drive of your preference for saving in-class work. It's also good to have an additional back-up. The hard drives on the computers are not dependable; **extensions will not be given for technological glitches.**

Other readings, as assigned.

Recommended (but not required) Materials.

Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*

A dictionary and a thesaurus are valuable as resources.

Reading Assignments. While there are only two required texts for the course, additional required readings will be assigned, as needed.

Students may quickly fall behind and, therefore, are strongly advised to stay current with the reading assignments. Assigned readings should be completed **prior** to class; students should come to class with the assigned reading's concepts both in memory and in written reading notes, i.e., prepared to discuss them intelligently in class.

Students, particularly public relations majors, should consider regularly reading hard copies or on-line versions of the following publications: *Public Relations Tactics* (these will be distributed in class as published); *Communication World* (available through IABC membership); *PR Week* (a weekly tabloid); *The Wall Street Journal*; *The New York Times*; *The Washington Post*; *London Times*; *The Economist*; and *Financial Times*.

Online course administration - Sakai: <http://lss.at.ufl.edu/> will be used to administer the course communication, materials (e.g., PowerPoint files, additional readings, handouts, assignment guidelines, evaluation forms) and grades. For instance, an electronic file of this document will be posted on Sakai. You can access the site by using your GatorLink username and password. Please check the site regularly for announcements and/or threads of comments from either your colleagues or the professor.

Course Professionalism. The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school and professional decorum is expected at all times. Therefore, **both the professor and students adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction.** Students are expected to **arrive on time and not leave early unless prior permission is sought and granted.** Talking while the instructor or another student is talking is unacceptable behavior and can result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately and will result in a lowering of your grade. Cell phones, pagers, laptops, beepers. BlackBerry devices, iPods and iPhones, Smart Phones, Androids, etc.. must be turned off

during class. Vibrate or silent mode is not considered off.

Diversity Statement. Effective **public relations practice relies on the ability to recognize and embrace diversity in all its forms, including viewpoints.** Throughout the class, students will have opportunities to see how different life experiences and cultural perspectives influence public relations. You are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities in your own work and to learn from the information and ideas shared by other students.

Students with Special Needs. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must submit a documentation letter to the professor when requesting accommodation. Please notify the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss requests for special provisions.

Academic Honesty. **The work you submit must be your own work and it must be original for this class.** You must not use direct or paraphrased material from any other source, including web sites, without attribution. You cannot submit anything that a peer wrote for this class, you wrote for another class, at an internship, as a volunteer or in another academic or professional setting. The professor will handle any incident of academic dishonesty in accordance with the University of Florida policy, such as the UF Honor Code and the Academic Honesty Guidelines that offer concrete examples of cheating, plagiarism, bribery, misrepresentation, conspiracy and fabrication.

Plagiarism (literary or artistic theft), copying someone else's work or other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any case of academic dishonesty will be considered grounds for an automatic failing grade in the course. University guidelines will be followed for any offenses.

Having someone else do your work for you is considered academic dishonesty.

When completing any of your writing assignments for this class, it is important to clearly attribute where you obtained your information, whether it's from a web site or from an organization's internal document. To clarify, 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. This includes web site copy, mission statements, etc. In these cases, you should paraphrase and cite the source as you write or simply quote it.

In short, please don't try to cheat, it's just too painful for both you and me!

The University of Florida Honor Code was voted on and passed by the Student Body in the Fall 1995 semester. The specifics of the Honor Code are attached. (See <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/honestybrochure.html>.)

Attendance. Because what we do in class meetings is so integral to the course, **prompt attendance at all class meetings is mandatory.** Anything else will negatively affect your grade. Attendance will be taken every class. **Two absences will be allowed without penalty. Two unexcused late arrivals (or early departures) will equal one absence. More than two absences will result in a penalty of -1% for each additional absence (maximum of 10%).**

Please be seated and prepared for class to begin on time. Lectures will not be postponed to allow for unpacking. Students may pack to leave only when the professor has dismissed the class; premature packing is disruptive to fellow students.

Please be aware that a student who attends class irregularly, comes to class late, leaves class early, fails to complete assignments on time or neglects assigned readings can normally expect to earn a low grade.

Missed Class. Please let the professor know **in writing** as soon as you realize you will need to miss class, preferably at the beginning of the semester, as it allows critical assignments or guest lectures to be properly planned.

If you miss class for any legitimate reason, including sickness or university-related travel, you must contact the professor before class meets (email is fine) and, then, provide written documentation at the next class meeting.

Students missing class must obtain class notes from another student. **Notes and/or PowerPoint slides are not available directly from the professor or the project team. PowerPoint slides will be posted on Sakai.**

Participation. Because this PUR 4100 is a learner-centered course, **student participation in class discussions and activities is essential.** Individual assignments also contribute to this portion of your grade.

The professor's role in this course is one of collaborator, facilitator, and coach. In other words, share thoughts, suggestions, criticisms, disagreement...but, whatever you do, talk in class. This portion of the grading is subjective, and you can only earn full credit if you consistently contribute to the class. Keeping up with the required reading will make contributions in this area more meaningful. Your participation efforts should be steady throughout the course. At the end of the course, participation grades primarily will be based on instructor assessments.

Deadlines. The practice of public relations hinges on meeting deadlines. Missing deadlines not only can damage a public relations professional's credibility, but also can lead to termination of a relationship with a client or to dismissal. Thus, deadlines are treated seriously in this class. All assignments are due **by the start of the class period** on the date of the deadline, unless otherwise instructed. **All students are to have hard copies of assignments printed prior to the start of class.** With the exception of the communication plan, you may submit a late assignment **only** if you:

- * notify the professor on or before the due date
- * submit no more than two late assignments in a semester
- * submit the assignment within 4 days of the due date
- * accept a grade penalty of 10% for each day the assignment is late

Any other late assignment – **including the communication plan and media kit** -- will not be accepted and will be given a grade of zero.

Format. All written work submitted for this course must be **coherent, logical, and carefully edited.** Writing proficiency is necessary to pass this course. **Misspellings, syntax and grammar errors as well as other writing problems are unacceptable** in upper-division college writing, especially in work by public relations students. Do not submit materials with editing marks on them; all assignments must be "**client-ready.**" Students may be referred to the Writing Center for more intensive work on specific writing skills and all students are encouraged to consider seeking Writing Center support for intensive one-on-one work in basic writing skills.

Unless otherwise specified, **all writing assignments must be typed with a 12-point serif font (e.g., Times, Palatino, or Times New Roman), double-spaced and framed by one-inch margins. AP style guidelines should be followed for all media related materials.** Because this class is a writing class, no additional consideration will be given to written work accompanied by artwork or any other kind of design element. However, a well-designed portfolio will be an advantage as a tool to assist in an internship or job search.

Mechanics & Fact Errors. Because this is a technical writing course as much as anything else, strong mechanics are expected. Unless otherwise specified, **use AP style on all media assignments.** Do not assume you will remember everything from earlier courses. Locate and open your stylebook now and review. Professor Pelfrey does not ask this to torture you, but because it is what is expected in the profession.

Any paper containing a **major factual error will receive a grade of 50.** 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. Errors which do a minor disservice to the reader, such as incorrect time or place for an event, will be graded somewhat more leniently, but remember **all factual errors will be considered serious**.

Course Requirements and Evaluation. Detailed written instructions for each of the assignments and the communication plan will be provided to you; templates will not be distributed. Your knowledge and ability to apply the course material from the text and from class discussions will be assessed in the following ways:

(1) Quizzes (10%). Announced and unannounced quizzes will be given periodically throughout the course to assess your comprehension of the material. The quizzes will be a mixture of multiple choice and short answer questions. **Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.** Quizzes will cover the information in the textbook; so, **read the chapters!** Reading this information will give you the tools to succeed with the other assessments. We will not have time in class to go over all of the information in the text, so you must read it ahead of time so that our classes can focus on application and discussion of the material. **No makeup quizzes will be given.**

(2) Assignments (40%). Typically, there will be at least one writing assignment every week. You will be asked to begin and/or complete some of your assignments in class; however, others will be outside-class assignments. The assignments will prepare you for the final communication plan project. You may **rewrite up to 2 assignments of your choice; rewrites are due 1 week after they are handed back and the grades are averaged.** As stated in the section on format, all written work submitted for this course must be coherent, logical, and carefully edited. Spelling, syntax and grammar errors, as well as other writing problems are unacceptable in upper-division college writing, especially in work by public relations students. Points will be deducted for these errors!

(3) Communication Plan (40%). You will be asked to select an existing client for whom you will introduce a new product or service of your design. Then, you will **develop a public relations communication plan to inform key target audiences and to promote the new product or service.** You will begin work on this project early in the semester, although the bulk of the plan will be completed in the last few weeks. The components of this project are:

The **communication plan** represents **40% of your final grade** in PUR 4100. Therefore, it should receive substantial time and attention if you are to receive a passing grade in this course.

Client selection is due **31 August 2012**.

Product or Service selection is due **Friday, 7 September 2012**.

Research/Information Gathering Report and Situation Analysis drafts are due **Wednesday, 19 September 2012**.

Objectives, Target Audiences and Strategies drafts are due **Wednesday, 3 October 2012**.

Tactics and Timeline drafts are due on **Monday, 22 October 2012**.

Budget drafts are due on **Wednesday, 31 October 2012**.

Final written **Communication Plan** is due **NO LATER than 4:00 pm** on **Friday, 16 November 2012**.

BONUS OPTION: Final Written Communication Plan is due **NO LATER than 4:00 pm** on **Thursday, 8 November 2012**.

Media Kit is due on the **date and time of your presentation** that will be randomly selected during an earlier class session.

Communication plan presentations will be given in class during the weeks of **19 November, 26 November and 3 December 2012**. Support materials may be provided and PowerPoint (or similar) should be utilized in the presentation. **A printed version of the PowerPoint should be submitted to the professor on the day of your presentation, along with the media kit.**

Each presentation will be allocated no more than 10 minutes plus questions and answers. **To be eligible for a full 5% of your plan grade, you must attend all class presentation sessions.**

(4) Attendance and Class Participation (10%) See descriptions above.

(5) Exams. None...lucky you!

Grading Scheme. You will primarily be evaluated on:

(1) the **ideas** you conceive *and* the extent to which you develop those ideas

(2) the **technical quality** of your written presentations:

- neat, typed, error-free copy that conforms to the AP stylebook, as needed
- material that is well-written, easy to follow and easy to understand
- pays special attention to spelling, grammar, punctuation and style
- uses the correct basic format for the public relations tool or genre specified and required for the assignment.

The grade for each assignment will depend on all of these components. **So a great conceptual piece in the correct format with poorly edited writing will only get a maximum of a B, as will a technically excellent piece that is not well conceptualized or in the correct format.**

If you are concerned about a grade received on a given quiz or assignment, please prepare a short paragraph outlining your position; submit that paragraph to the professor for review. You will receive a response within 7 to 10 days. We can follow up with a discussion during regular office hours, if needed.

Quiz, project and assignment grades will be based on the following 100-point scale:

90.0–100	A
86.5–89.9	B+
80.0–86.4	B
76.5–79.9	C+
70.0–76.4	C
66.5–69.9	D+
60.0–66.4	D
< 59.9	E/F

Final grades will be based on the 100-point scale. Please note that neither a plus nor a minus will be used on final grades:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	E/F

Final Notes

The professor reserves **the right to make changes** if necessary to the grading system, syllabus, and schedule for this class.

Computers are great tools, and we'll obviously be using them extensively in this course. But they can also be distracting! Laptop computers are welcome in class **only for taking notes**. Because your classmates and I will need your full attention during our brief class time together, you may not eat, chat, email, text message, tweet, surf, etc. during class time. Anyone who does so will be requested to leave class and to leave the laptop or other device in the professor's care.

Please **do not print during class time** unless instructed to do so. It is disruptive to your colleagues and the professor. Printing may be done prior to class or after class.

This class is intense, but is definitely rewarding. If you notice yourself having trouble, it is crucial that you see the professor immediately. Please feel free to approach me about any concerns you might have in this class or other classes. I will do my best to have an "open door" policy with you.

Please turn off your cell phones, pagers, beepers, BlackBerry devices, iPods, iPhones, iPads, SmartPhones, Androids, etc. in class. Vibrate and silent are not considered off.

Useful University of Florida Services.

Disability Resource Center: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Reading and Writing Center: <http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter/>

Counseling Center: <http://www.counsel.ufl.edu/>

Dean of Students Office: <http://dso.ufl.edu/>

Academic Student Honor Code

(<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/studenthonorcode.php>)

The Honor Code: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. 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."

VIOLATIONS OF THE HONOR CODE AND SANCTIONS.

(a) **Conduct Prohibited by the Honor Code.** Students are prohibited from engaging in the following conduct:

1. **Conduct Constituting Academic Dishonesty.** A student shall not engage in conduct which constitutes academic dishonesty.
2. **False or Misleading Statement for the Purpose of Procuring an Academic Advantage.** A student shall not intentionally or in bad faith make a false or misleading statement for the purpose of procuring from the person to whom the statement is made an academic advantage for any student.
3. **False or Misleading Statement Relating to an Honor Code Violation.** In reporting an alleged Honor Code violation, a student shall not intentionally or in bad faith make a false or misleading statement.
4. **Prohibited Collaboration or Consultation.** A student shall not without express authorization collaborate or consult with another person in an academic activity.
5. **Prohibited Use of Materials or Resources.** A student shall not use unauthorized materials or resources in an academic activity. Unauthorized materials or resources shall include:
 - a. Any paper or project authored by the student and presented by the student for the satisfaction of any academic requirement if the student has previously submitted substantially the same paper or project to satisfy an academic requirement and did not receive express authorization to submit the paper or project.
 - b. Any materials or resources prepared by another student and used without the student's express consent.
 - c. Any materials or resources which the faculty member has notified the student in writing are prohibited.
 - d. If a faculty member has authorized a student to use specified materials or resources, the student shall not exceed that authority. If the student wishes to use any material or resource to which the authority does not plainly extend, the student shall first ascertain whether the use is authorized.
6. **Plagiarism.** A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):
 - a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.
 - b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.
7. **Use of Fabricated or Falsified Information.** A student shall not use or present invented or fabricated information; or falsified research or other findings if the student knows or in the exercise of ordinary care should be aware that the information, research, or other findings have been falsified.
8. **Interference with or Sabotage of Academic Activity.** A student shall not do any act or take any material for the purpose of interfering with or sabotaging an academic activity.
9. **Unauthorized Taking or Receipt of Materials or Resources to Gain an Academic Advantage.** A student shall not without express authorization take or receive materials or resources from a faculty member for the purpose of gaining an academic advantage.
10. **Unauthorized Recordings.** A student shall not without express authorization make or receive any recording of any class, co-curricular meeting, organizational meeting, or meeting with a faculty member.
11. **Bribery.** A student shall not offer, give, receive, or solicit a bribe of money, materials, goods, or services for the purpose of procuring or providing an academic advantage.
12. **Submission of Paper or Academic Work Purchased or Obtained from an Outside Source.** A student shall not submit as his or her own work a paper or other academic work that was purchased or otherwise obtained from an outside source.

