

## **Public Relations Writing**

JOUR 3421-M50

Fall 2016

Online

Dr. Megan E. Mallicoat

Office: Online

Office Hours: To be arranged

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## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **CATALOG DESCRIPTION**

Emphasis on communication tactics; plan, write, and produce public relations tools; audience and media selection; print and electronic media.

### **PREREQUISITES**

JOUR 2121, JOUR 3400

### **TEXTBOOKS**

Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2014). *Public relations writing: Form and style* (10th ed.). Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

*The Associated Press Stylebook 2016* (or 2015). New York: Basic Books.

### **CLASS FORMAT**

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, we have no scheduled meeting time. This can be convenient for you, but it also means that it is absolutely essential for you to be an organized, motivated student.

The course will be managed through eCourseware. **You can access the course by logging into eCourseware at <https://elearn.memphis.edu> or by using the following login.**

This online course is administered using the U of M's eCourseware platform. The course page will open on Aug. 22. Follow the instructions below to access the course:

1. Go to the University of Memphis home page: <http://www.memphis.edu>
2. Click on the "MyMemphis" link.
3. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
4. Click on the "ecampus resources" tab.
5. In the center column of the page, click on the blue U of M eCourseware link.
6. Find the Fall 2016 course list on that page, and click on the link for JOUR 3421 M50.

You'll need reliable Internet access and a reliable computer with Microsoft Word (or other word-processing software that can generate a .doc or .docx file). I must be able to open your work in order to grade it. If you don't submit your work through eCourseware in the requested format (typically as a Word document), you risk big point deductions. You will be responsible to complete numerous assignments throughout the semester. Do not let yourself fall behind! Deadlines are critical for public relations professionals. You are expected to submit all assignments on time. Deadlines are given in Central time.

During this class, you'll have the chance to produce work for local non-profit organizations. You might also have the opportunity to work in groups for several assignments. You'll submit your assignments in eCourseware, and I'll provide feedback meant to encourage you and help you improve. You are strongly encouraged to ask me any questions you might have or talk about any struggles you experience. Don't wait. The longer you put off getting help with the course, the harder it is to get back on track.

**GRADING**

There are 1,000 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class average will be calculated and fractions will be rounded to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below.

*Writing Assignments*

Fact sheet	75 points
News release	75 points
Feature release	75 points
Position paper	75 points
Brochure	75 points
Social media release	75 points

*Media Kit* 150 points

*Video Project* 100 points

*Personal Portfolio* 100 points

*Class Participation* 200 points

*Total* 1,000 points

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A+	967-1000	B+	867-899	C+	767-799	D+	667-699
A	934-966	B	834-866	C	734-766	D	634-665
A-	900-933	B-	800-833	C-	700-733	D-	600-633
						F	Below 600

**QUALITY OF WORK**

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar and language. A large part of public relations is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. When you use information (including images) from any source, you should cite it appropriately. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, talk with me. I am more than happy to help you understand what it is and how to avoid it. All work submitted for this class must be your original work. You may not reuse assignments created for other purposes, including other courses, and you may not use work created by someone else.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, please understand that some material may require more or less discussion and class time. Thus, changes to the schedule may occur.

<i>Week Of</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings &amp; Assignments</i>
August 22	Syllabus/Course Overview	
August 29	The Role & Responsibility of PR Writing	Chapters 1-3
September 5	Research & Planning	Chapters 4-5 Fact sheet due
September 12	Writing & Editing	Chapters 6, 7, and 10 News release due
September 19	Writing & Editing	Feature release due
September 26	Writing for Social Media	Chapter 8 SMNR due
October 3	TBA	
October 10	<i>Fall Break</i>	
October 17	Crafting Messages	Chapters 12-14 Brochure due
October 24	Crafting Messages	
Oct. 31	Crisis Communication	Chapter 16 Position paper due
November 7	Pitches & Presentations	Chapters 9 and 15 Media kit due
November 14	Pitches & Presentations	Video project due
November 21	<i>Thanksgiving</i>	
November 28	Conclusion	Personal portfolios due

## **FIVE PILLARS OF JOUR3421**

- *Professionalism*: Students learn the professional and ethical standards of the public relations industry by discussing ethics statements from a variety of professional organizations, working through simulated ethical scenarios from a variety of perspectives and learning how and why legal ramifications may exist within the field. Students continue work on their personal portfolio sites as a way of establishing their personal professional brand.
- *Writing*: JOUR 3421 focuses on writing for a variety of public relations formats, including press releases, position or white papers, fact sheets, press conference statements, brochures and newsletters, writing for various social media platforms and feature releases. Students also edit and critique not only their work but also the work of their peers.
- *Multimedia*: Students look at the use of social media in public relations, including the potential for community engagement and management, the importance of consistent organizational voice across multiple platforms and how to translate one message into a variety of social media platforms. Students also add collateral pieces to their online portfolios.
- *Critical Thinking*: Students must demonstrate an understanding of writing for a specific public, writing from a specific point of view for an organization and how to choose the best media channel to accomplish both of those tasks.
- *Media Literacy*: Students increase their media literacy by looking at how to engage with a variety of traditional and social media, to see how relationships and communities are built within these channels and how to interact and engage with others in the media appropriately.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOUR3421**

- 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 communication;
- 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

## **HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET**

### **Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically):**

Students will:

- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content;
- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations;
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing;
- Understand the differences between writing for various mediums.

### **Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies):**

Students will:

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and exams;
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written materials;
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others;
- Pitch story ideas to news media; and
- Respond to crisis communication situations.

## **HOW ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING WILL BE MET FOR JOUR3421:**

This class is designed to equip students with the skills needed to write correctly in controlled, mass and social media outlets for various audiences.

### *Awareness:*

- Learn about the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP-style and the various forms of writing for different media.

### *Understanding:*

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.

### *Application:*

- Create collateral materials that are common in public relations practice; write for various forms of media; respond to a crisis communication situation.

## **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be to

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Council seeks to promote student learning and encourages experimentation and innovation. Assessment is a system of evaluation of student learning at the course or unit level (as opposed to grading at the individual level). Three criteria should guide assessment of student learning:

- *Awareness*: familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, processes and effects.
- *Understanding*: assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts, theories and ideas.
- *Application*: competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks.

### **DEPARTMENT POLICIES**

#### **PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT:**

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Students are to begin the portfolio in JOUR 2121 and contribute to it from every course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from his/her courses and/or professional experience and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in the capstone course for their majors.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. The department requires students to use WordPress to build their portfolio sites. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail or Yahoo.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files, and Storify pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

**EMAIL:**

You must have your UM email account activated. If you are using another provider such as Google, you are required to have your UM email forwarded to that account. Go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UM email. You are required to check your email daily. You are responsible for complying with any email sent to you by your professor or the University.

**MOBILE PHONES AND LAPTOPS:**

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Your instructor will set the policy for her/her specific class.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Class attendance is mandatory in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance, or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements, which are acceptable to your professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence due to illness or other catastrophic emergency such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. If you have some problem making it to class on time make arrangements to fix the problem or consider taking another class. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be on time just as you would elsewhere.

**CHEATING:**

In addition to university-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or a student receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on his/her own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. That may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the university.

Further, as this is a journalism/mass communication class, students are expected to comply with copyright law, and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

“Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com’s restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.” (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)

**ONLINE SETEs:**

You are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a teacher evaluation for that class. How to access your evaluation forms: Log in using your UUID and email password; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. It will only take a few minutes of your time. We take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and will be appreciated.

**DEADLINES:**

Remember there’s a reason “DEAD” makes up half the word “deadline.” All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. If you get into trouble, talk to your instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

**AP STYLE AND GRAMMAR:**

All written work in this class should follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. If you don’t know the style for a particular phrase, look it up or ask your classmates or the instructor.

**DISABILITY:**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

**DIVERSITY:**

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Mass communications reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

**WEATHER POLICY:**

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the university is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day’s work.