

Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3421-M50

Spring 2021

Professor Taylor Nicole Ackerman

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Catalog Description

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

Prerequisites

JRSM 2121, PBRL 3400

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

The Public Relations Writer's Handbook. Lehmann, W. (2020). New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-8153-6528-0 eBook ISBN: 978-1-3512-6192-0

*Available in hard copy or eBook. eBook is available for rent via Amazon for approximately \$25

The Associated Press Stylebook 2019 (or 2018). New York: Basic Books
ISBN: 978-0-917360-68-8

*You can also access *The AP Stylebook* as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at apstylebook.com

Other readings will be assigned and posted to eCourseware.

Classroom Format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, there is no required scheduled meeting time for this course. This can be convenient for students juggling several responsibilities, but it also means you must be organized and motivated. Students are able to work at their own pace throughout the week, however work will be due on a weekly basis and it is imperative to stay on track with the course schedule to complete all deadlines on time.

Though there will be no required meetings, a few live Zoom discussions will be offered for clarification on class material, assignments, and to discuss important class concepts. Attendance of these live Zoom classes will not be required and non-attendance will not negatively affect your grade.

You must have Internet access and Microsoft Word or other word processing software that generates a ".doc" extension. .doc will be the required format for your written work. Design projects will need to be in .PDF or .PNG depending on the assignment. Read each assignment carefully for the desired file type.

Some assignments will need to be completed using design programs such as Canva, Adobe Spark, or Adobe Indesign. Canva and Adobe Spark can be accessed for free. Adobe Indesign or Adobe Illustrator can be accessed using University software. See more details in eCourseware.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Spring 2021 course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3421-M50 to enter.

Students with disabilities & accommodations

If you will need accommodations through [Disability Resources](#) to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to provide the tools you need to succeed in this course.

Stress, coursework, the pandemic, and resources

I understand that the past year has been challenging for many, and that balancing school, work, and other responsibilities can be difficult. The events of the world have been heavy, and I know many are carrying much more stress than normal. If you start to feel yourself falling behind or feeling overwhelmed for any reason please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm happy to work with you to find solutions that help you succeed.

If you find yourself or your family affected by COVID-19, please let me know as soon as you are able and we will make alternate solutions for coursework so that you are first able to focus on you and your loved ones getting healthy.

Also, the University of Memphis offers a number of excellent resources that you may find helpful in several different situations. Below are some links that you may find helpful:

Counseling and Mental Health: [Mental health Services](#)

Health & Corona Virus Information: [UofM Student Health Center](#)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](#)

[Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund](#)

[Emergency Food Resources](#), which includes [Tiger Pantry](#)

[Emergency Housing](#)

[Specific COVID-19 relief funds](#)

Course Requirements & Expectations

Weekly News Items: Each week, a news item will be posted to the home page of our eCourseware shell to explain the assignments for the week, required readings, and class expectations. By end of day each Monday, there will be a note from me covering what we'll be doing for the week, where to find the material, and any other relevant information. Be sure to check these news items each week as they will contain the most up to date pertinent class information.

Assignments. There will be a total of eight weekly assignments that will be due throughout the semester, 25 points each for a total of 200 points. Each weekly assignment must be completed by Sundays at 11:59 p.m. central standard time on the weeks they are due. Check the weekly news item

for details on assignments and deadlines. These assignments will vary in nature, and assignment sheets will need to be read carefully for instructions.

Hootsuite Certification. As part of this class you will be required to earn your Hootsuite Platform Certification. The Hootsuite Platform Certification is industry-recognized and demonstrates your expertise with the social media management platform Hootsuite. The normal cost of this certification is \$99 but as a member of this class, you will be able to access the training materials and the exam FREE. Details about this process will be provided separately. The Hootsuite Certification will be worth 100 points.

Discussion forum. Despite being an online course, students are expected to have active class participation. Participation will be evaluated by your response and activity in eCourseware discussion forums. Each discussion will include one or more discussions about topics covered in the readings or the PR industry in general. Your responses should be well articulated and substantial. Clearly indicate your main idea or point of view and support it with facts, logic and references as appropriate. When asked to provide feedback on your peer's discussion posts, simply stating, for example, "Yes," "No," "I agree," or "I don't think so" is not acceptable and will not be considered participation. As a guideline, I recommend your original written posts should be at least 150 words and replies to your peers should be at least 100 words. I expect regular participation and active students will demonstrate that by regular posts that meet the requirements and deadlines. There will be a total five discussion boards worth 20 points each, for a total of 100 points.

Portfolio. You will be required to update your online portfolio to showcase your work and to continue to build your professional online presence. Specific requirements will be provided separately.

Quizzes. There will be both AP (Associated Press) Style quizzes and quizzes on the content throughout the semester to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and other assignments. Quizzes must be completed by Sunday night at 11:59 p.m. (CST). Check the course schedule for specific dates. Quizzes are timed and you must complete the quiz in the time allotted. You will have two attempts for each quiz, with a time limit of 30 minutes. Missed quizzes cannot be made up. Quizzes will be worth a total of 200 points. There will be five AP quizzes (worth 20 points each) and four course material quizzes (worth 25 points each).

Writing Projects. As a writing-focused class, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients' stories. Often the best way to learn can be learning by experience, creating the documents we are learning about in this class to refine our skills and exercise our creative "muscles." You will create a total of 10 communication pieces, worth a total of 600 points. These writing projects will be featured within your online portfolios. The following pieces will be created:

Media Pitch: 50 points

Backgrounder: 50 points

Brochure: 100 points

FAQ Sheet: 50 points

News Release: 50 points

Infographic: 50 points

Social Media Posts: 50 points

Website Wireframe & About Page: 100 points

Radio Spot: 50 points

Piece of Choice: 50 points

More details on each assignment and their deadlines will be provided on eCourseware.

In order to create these pieces, we need to gain inspiration from the information in our book and class readings, course discussions and presentations; consider current events and the big picture (be relevant, timely, and culturally appropriate); do primary and secondary research; and seek to build relationships with our audiences. We will use strategic storytelling to create the communication pieces that reach our audiences. The facts you present will need to be well researched and the assignments will need to be formatted according to course expectations and material. It is absolutely acceptable to gain inspiration from several places, including social media posts, Pinterest, online and book examples, etc. However, all work that is submitted must be your own - your own layout, words, ideas, thoughts, examples. Plagiarized and unoriginal work will not be accepted, and could result in a failing grade on an assignment/in the class.

Extra Credit: A few opportunities will be offered this semester for extra credit points that can be applied to any assignment. Check weekly news items for details on these extra credit opportunities.

Grading

There are 1,200 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class points will be calculated and rounded up to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below.

- A: 1080 - 1200 points**
- B: 960 - 1079 points**
- C: 840 - 959 points**
- D: 720 - 839**
- F: 719 and below**

Grading Philosophy

A=Professional quality work that could be used with little or no modification

B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally

C=Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision

D=Barely satisfies minimum requirement and below average quality

F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirement

Citation policy

For this class, we'll use AP Style (<https://www.apstylebook.com>) and APA style (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html).

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar and language. The work you create in this course should be professional and "publish ready", and this means being properly edited and polished. This includes all class work and presentations, and is particularly important in regards to your written pieces. Problems in these areas will lead to a deduction in points. In order to polish your AP skills, quizzes and lessons will be given throughout the semester.

If you are including information from outside sources, you need to include full citations in APA formatting. Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

Plagiarism policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, discussion of ethics and department expectations

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo, report filed with department

Third offense: Automatic class fail and report filed with department

Late work

<24 hours late: -10% (perfect = 90% A)

24-48 hours late: -20% (perfect = 80% B)

48-72 hours late: -30% (perfect = 70% C)

Final call: Up to 50% credit (perfect = 50% F)

**Quizzes are exempt from the late policy and must be done by the deadline unless previous arrangements have been set forth or there are extenuating circumstances.

Course Schedule

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although we will try to stick with this schedule, please understand that changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced as soon as possible. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. C.T. unless otherwise noted. We will start each week on Monday.

Week 1, January 18 - 24

Readings: Chapter 1; Check eCourseware

Assignments: Assignment 1 Opening Survey & Introduction Discussion Board 1

Week 2, January 25 - 31

Readings: Chapters 2 & 3; Check eCourseware

Assignments: AP Quiz #1; Discussion Board 2

Week 3, February 1 - 7

Readings: Chapters 4 & 6; Check eCourseware

Assignments: Media Pitch Due; Quiz 1; AP Quiz #2

Week 4, February 8 - 14

Readings: Chapters 8 & 9; Check eCourseware

Assignments: Assignment 2 Editing Assignment; Backgrounder Due

Week 5, February 15 - 21

Readings: Chapter 13; Check eCourseware

Assignments: News Release Due; Quiz 2; Discussion Board 3

Week 6, February 22 - 28

Readings: Chapter 14; Check eCourseware
Assignments: AP quiz #3; Discussion Board 4; Writing Piece of Choice Due

Week 7, March 1 - 7

Readings: Chapter 10; Check eCourseware
Assignments: Assignment 3 Website Storytelling Examples; FAQ Sheet Due

Week 8, March 8 - 14

Wellness Break March 8 & 9
No readings this week
Assignments: Assignment 4 Mid Semester Survey
Use this week to work on Hootsuite Certification (due next week), catch up on assignments, and give yourself a break! Do some self-care this week.

Week 9, March 15 - 21

Readings: Chapter 5; Check eCourseware
Assignments: Hootsuite Certification due; Website Wireframe + About Page due

Week 10, March 22 - 28

Readings: Chapter 15; Check eCourseware
Assignments: Assignment 5 Hootsuite Reflection, Quiz #3, AP Quiz #4

Week 11, March 29 - April 4

Readings: Chapter 17 & 18; Check eCourseware
Assignments: Assignment 6 Social Media Examples; Brochure Due

Week 12, April 5 - 11

Wellness Break April 8 & 9
No Readings this week
Assignments: Discussion 5
Discussion 5 will be your only assignment due this week. Use this week to catch up on work and prepare for your upcoming final assignments and update your portfolio. Also fit in some self care. You're almost through the semester!

Week 13, April 12 - 18

Readings: Chapter 7 & 16; Check eCourseware
Assignments: Social Media Posts Due; AP Quiz 5

Week 14, April 19 - 25

Readings: Check eCourseware
Assignments: Assignment 7 Portfolio Due; Infographic Due; Quiz #4

Week 15, April 26 - May 2

Readings: Check eCourseware
Assignments: Assignment 8 Closing Survey; Radio Spot Due

Five Pillars in PBRL 3421

- *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 communicate their message to a target audience.
- *Media Literacy*: Students learn how to engage with both traditional and social media; how relationships and communities are built within these channels; and how to choose the appropriate media channels based on their desired target audience and message they are communicating. Students also demonstrate understanding of the platform they are writing for and the individual requirements of each format.
- *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 understand the importance of both communicating visually and the power of the words they use. Students also add collateral pieces to their online portfolios.
- *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*: Students focus on writing for a variety of public relations formats, including press releases, media pitches, radio spots, backgrounders, fact and FAQ sheets, brochures and newsletters, various social media, website and digital platforms, and infographics. Students edit and critique not only their work but also the work of their peers. Students learn how to utilize earned, shared, and owned media to communicate to publics.

Professional values and competencies for PBRL 3421

- 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 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.
- 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 current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.
- Demonstrate an understanding of strategic communication and choosing the best medium for the message.

How professional values and competencies will be met

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

- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products and appropriate channels to reach the target audience.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.
- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- Understand the differences between writing for various mediums.
- Evaluate their own and other's public relations writing for accuracy, clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style, as well as suitability for specified medium.
- Understand how to use appropriate software and hardware to create public relations products, as well as how to effectively utilize social media channels to communicate with the target audience.

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

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and exams.
- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Identify appropriate images/graphics to accompany public relations products based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Identify common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write a press release, fact sheet or backgrounder, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written public relations materials.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.
- Learn about the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Learn about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Learn about the different public relations products, which tools are used to create them, and what media each is best suited for.

Understanding

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.
- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Recognize potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Understand which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

Application

- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Write a press release, backgrounder, fact sheet, brochure and radio spot for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA 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. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or SquareSpace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they 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 lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

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 writing 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

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of 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). Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade ("C-") in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

Academic integrity

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

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media 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 rating originality of your ideas. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. *(Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018)*

Online SETEs

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, students can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIs and email passwords; click on the gray "Student" tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the 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 must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Diversity and inclusivity

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. Media 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. This course is completely online, so coursework will not be affected by closures and delays.

Student support

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.

Student Accommodations

Students with accessibility issues or learning accommodation issues due to a disability should contact Disability Resources for Students (DRS) to submit an official request for course accommodations. Contact DRS at 901.678.2880 or at drs@memphis.edu. (<https://www.memphis.edu/drs/index.php>)

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly, through participation or assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class in addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular institutional disciplinary procedures. (<https://www.memphis.edu/osa/students/academic-misconduct.php>)

Student Health

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at deanofstudents@memphis.edu.

Student Resources

Students who need additional resources can visit the Dean of Students Office website at <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php>.

Guidelines for classes, labs and equipment in Meeman Journalism Building in Spring 2021

- Anyone feeling sick should stay home and join class virtually.
- Social distance from all others at least 6 feet.
- Wear a mask at all times when in University buildings and on campus.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer regularly.
- No more than one person in the elevator at a time.
- Disinfect your workstation before and after use, including desks, keyboards, mice and screens. Wash your hands after cleaning.
- Have phone or Zoom meetings with professors and classmates. Do not meet face to face, if

possible.