Public Relations Writing  
JOMC 232 – Syllabus  
Spring 2015  
Mon/Wed 11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Carroll Hall 141  
Office Hours: Mon/Wed after class (12:30-1:30) or by appt

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:  
Kylah Hedding  
Room 367  
Carroll Hall  
Email: khedding@unc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:  
This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and a service-learning class. We will cover major communication tools of the public relations trade for multiple communication platforms, including news releases, pitch letters, fact sheets, public service announcements, blogs, social media and more. The skills of writing are learned by doing; you will have ample opportunities to learn by writing every day.

Prerequisites: To take this course as an undergraduate, you must have successfully completed JOMC 153: News writing and J137: Principles of Advertising and Public Relations. No exceptions.

Course Objectives: By the end of the course, students should be able to

- quickly produce any of the professional written materials required in the public relations profession;
- integrate strategy into communication pieces to target appropriate/diverse audiences and media and to effectively advocate a cause;
- because this course simulates the working conditions of most public relations firms, you will learn to professionally present material,
- finally, you will develop an online portfolio.
Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications has developed a series of competencies students should demonstrate by the time of graduation: [http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps](http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps). No single course could possibly give you a solid grasp of all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on:

- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which you work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate your 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 you work.

**REQUIRED TEXTS AND OTHER INFORMATION:**

**Required Text:** Barbara Diggs-Brown, *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice*; and *The Associated Press Stylebook*. I assign supplemental materials as well – see the syllabus and Sakai for details. All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned to generate discussion and ensure you’re prepared to write. If necessary, I will conduct pop quizzes on text material.

**Computer Supplies:** All work should be saved to a thumb drive, laptop or your email and not to the hard drive (it gets dumped regularly). Murphy's law is alive and well in computer labs, and snafus do occur. Save early and often – I can't resurrect lost documents!

**Reference Materials:** Use of reference materials – dictionary, thesaurus, those kind of fun things – to double check accuracy is encouraged (in fact, I'm begging you!). These materials are available in the classroom and in the School’s library.

**Sakai:** All PowerPoints and other handouts are/will be posted up on Sakai for your convenience – see the Resources link. Please consult these materials to ensure you produce quality communication tools in this class. This syllabus is also on/Sakai, and assignments will be posted in the Assignments folder (how original!).

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:**

All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced and turned in on time. Late assignments will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree before the assignment is due that it can be late. Late assignments will receive 30 points off automatically. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline.

**News Content:** Keep up with current events! It’s important to know what’s going on in the world, and what issues your clients (today and in the future) face or will face. Makes you an effective practitioner!

**Outside Assignments and APPLES clients:** As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work with a client organization to produce communication pieces for them. You will be expected to do periodic check-ins on the APPLES experiences and meet with the instructor to discuss progress. Failure to do the check-ins will affect your grade. At the end of the class, you will present your materials in a portfolio.
The APPLES experience is valuable in that it provides professional pieces for your portfolio and gives you experience in working in the professional realm. Although this is summer and your client is “internal,” do not forget your professionalism!

**Overview of grade breakdown and due dates:**

**Exams:** Two exams, a midterm and a final, will be given. The midterm exam will be a 90-minute in-class writing exercise. The final (take-home) exam will be a longer writing exercise that covers the full session. Failure to show up for the midterm exam or to make prior arrangements to take it later will result in a grade of F. Failure to complete the final will result in an F.

**Course Grade Calculation:** I will calculate your final grade as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>A = 90-100 (-, )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technique exercises</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>B = 80-89 (+/-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>C = 70-79 (+/-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>D = 60-69 (+/-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>F = below 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I follow the University’s Grading Standards:**

"A" students do not miss classes during the semester. They read and critically engage all the assigned textbook chapters and any optional readings on reserve before the material is covered in class. Written assignments and exams are not only complete but cover more than just the minimum requirements. The assignments exhibit proper style and format, are well organized, integrate strategic planning and targeting, and are written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time or early, and all rewrite opportunities are used. These students keep up with current events.

"B" students miss one or two classes during the semester, but these are excused absences. They usually read the assigned textbook chapters and some of the optional readings on reserve in the library before the material is covered in class. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, integrate strategic planning and targeting, are well organized, and are written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time, and all rewrite opportunities are used. These students tend to keep up with current events.

"C" students miss one or two classes during the semester, usually excused. They read the assigned textbook chapters and some of the optional readings on reserve in the library just before the material is covered on the exam. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, but they do not always integrate strategic planning and targeting and are not always well organized or written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time, and most rewrite opportunities are used. These students sometimes keep up with current events.

"D" students miss three or more classes during the semester and skim assigned readings. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, but they often lack integrated strategic planning and targeting and are often not well organized or written precisely and concisely. Materials are not always turned in on time; only some rewrite opportunities are used. They don’t keep up with current events.

"F" students fail to come to class on a regular basis. They miss exams and written assignments and fail to use rewrite opportunities.

**Please note:** Students who earn less than a C-minus in the course will have to retake the class.
**Honor Code:** It is expected that each student in this class will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (http://honor.unc.edu). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class.
If you haven’t read the code in a while, please revisit it!
http://studentconduct.unc.edu/sites/studentconduct.unc.edu/files/Fall2012print.pdf.

**Nondiscrimination Policy:** The University's policy on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination is available at http://policy.sites.unc.edu/files/2013/04/nondiscrim.pdf. In summary, UNC does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, or disabilities.

**Harassment:** UNC does not tolerate harassment based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, disability, or for any other reason. It is also a violation of the Honor Code and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Title IX of the Educational Amendments. If you need assistance with a harassment issue or problem, bring it to my attention or The Office of the Dean of Students, dos@unc.edu or 919.966.4042.

**Special Accommodations:** If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let me know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Department of Disability Services website at http://disabilityservices.unc.edu or call 919.962.8300. If you need assistance or services from the Academic Success Program for Students with LD/ADHD please contact them at 919-962-7227 or http://www.unc.edu/asp/

**ATTENDANCE:**

**Attendance:** Regular, on-time class attendance your obligation, and you are responsible for all work, including tests and written work, for all class meetings. No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any given number of class meetings. **Note:** In practical terms, almost one-third of your grade is based on in-class assignments, making regular class attendance vital. **An unexcused absence will result in a 0 for that day's assignment.**

**Absences:** You may make up work you missed if an absence is pre-approved. It will be easier to obtain permission than forgiveness. That day's assignment will be available on Sakai at the beginning of class time and must be turned in to me by the end of the day that day, unless we make other arrangements.

**Pep Talk:** This class will at intervals be time consuming and difficult. Your first few assignments possibly will receive low grades, which can be discouraging. Realize that if you put forth the effort, your work should improve throughout the semester, and this improvement will be reflected in your grades. **Please, come talk to me at any time if you have questions or concerns about the course. My objective for the course is to make it a positive learning experience, admittedly through your hard work. I am a resource available for your help, not an obstacle in your path.**
Guidelines for Grading of Assignments

See the next sheet, which is a modified version of the JOMC 153, “News writing,” criteria, for how in-class and outside assignments will be graded. The following guidelines also apply.

In-class assignments:

- Ample time will be given in class to work on in-class assignments. You may not always complete the piece, however. Don't worry. If you have a good start (at least three paragraphs), you have what is necessary to write the piece. Speed comes with practice. I only grade what you turn in.

- Don’t wait until the last moment to send your copy. Give yourself time to proofread. 'Tis better to have quality work that’s not yet complete than a completed assignment riddled with errors! I will alert you when there are about 10 minutes remaining in class. Save, save, save!

- Make sure you give me the correct assignment. If you send me the wrong assignment I will give you the chance to send me the correct one, however, your assignment will be docked 30 points. You will have 24 hours upon notification to send me the correct assignment, otherwise you will get a 0.

- Save your assignments somewhere other than the lab computer hard drive! They are often wiped.

Out-of-class assignments (technique exercises, client portfolios):

- Assignments are due at the beginning of class time. Late assignments (and, yes, that includes one minute late!) are docked 30 points. Assignments turned in more than 24 hours late automatically will be assigned a grade of 0.

- Out-of-class assignments should be picture perfect when they are turned in. They may not be edited on hard copy. Obvious corrections, such as penned-in material, correction fluid, typeovers, etc., will be penalized 10 points each.

Rewrites:

- You may redo any in-class assignment that receives a grade of 60 or lower. The rewrite is due no later than two days after you receive the assignment back, no later than the beginning of that class period. It is your responsibility to meet this deadline. The rewrite grade and the original grade will be averaged to determine your final grade for that assignment.

- You must FIRMLY attach the original work with your rewrite. If no original is attached, the rewrite will not be graded.

- Rewrites also will be subject to greater scrutiny. Mistakes I missed the first time around I may catch on the second read. Proofread your rewrites carefully!
Grading Criteria for All Assignments

There are two components to each of your grades: Strategy addresses appropriateness and accuracy of the content and approach; and technique addresses spelling, grammar, punctuation, AP style and other formatting issues.

I. Writing
- +5 for an exceptionally effective lead and supporting material
- +5 to +10 for exceptionally effective organization and treatment of material
- +2 for effective transition or introduction of material
- +2 to +10 for excellence in quality of information used
- +2 to +10 for excellence in determining targeting strategy
- -5 to -10 for ineffective or missing treatment of material, including, but not limited to, wordiness; use of jargon or clichés; inclusion of unnecessary or obvious information; redundancy; inappropriate choice or use of quoted material; incorrect word choice, including sexist language
- -5 to -10 for an ineffective lead that needs work or for lack of supporting material for lead
- -15 to -20 for missing the lead entirely or burying it
- -10 for failure to include contact information on pieces (as appropriate to the communications piece)

II. Mechanics
- -5 for each error or inconsistency in style
- -5 for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs
- -5 for each spelling error (yes, typos are spelling errors)
- -5 for each punctuation error
- -5 for each grammatical error
- -10 for each minor factual error

**-50 for misspelling a proper name (this includes both people and organizations); -10 for each subsequent misspelling of a proper name**

III. Research/Gathering Information
- +/-15 for addressing material to appropriate publics
- +/-15 for making the message or statement clear (i.e., a news peg; inclusion of key message)
- +/-5 to 10 for resource selection: quality and number of sources used; appropriateness of individual sources, including the level of expertise or authority involved
- +/-5 to 20 for thoroughness of material: existence of loose ends, holes, or unanswered questions; development of significant angles; inclusion of needed detail
- +/-5 to 15 for backgrounding; research necessary to make the work complete or to provide needed explanations
- +/-20 for handling of legal matters, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, and copyright violations

**Note:** Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same piece for recurring errors or for continual superior performance.
Service Learning and Client Portfolio – Group Projects and Presentations

The final client portfolio will represent the culmination of your work for your client over the semester. You will turn this in as a group, though you may separately work on different parts of the portfolio. It is imperative that you begin now to determine how you want to contribute.

Your final presentation and portfolio should be submitted in a professional manner. This means for the presentation you should have a developed presentation with visual components (such as PowerPoints, handouts, posters, etc.) to make the presentation interesting, and the portfolio should be comprehensive and cohesive (though I will leave the manner of submission up to you – you could consider a hard copy, PDF, or website, as some examples).

Remember: Through service learning, you will develop client contact skills, which are essential for professional development. Be sure to write up this experience on your resume and include any communication items you produced/helped create in your portfolio. Class time will be spent discussing these assignments and more handouts will follow.

The Portfolio you turn in at the end of the semester should include:

1. **Memo of the work completed.** This would be similar to a memo that you might write for boss overviewing activities for a particular client. More details will be provided in class and on Sakai.
2. **Final time sheet** (for each person). Signed by you and the client. Must be at least 30 hours.
3. **Communication audit.** More details will be provided in class and on Sakai.
4. **Written PR piece.** Each individual needs to have developed at least one PR piece that requires substantial writing, such as a press release, blog post, story for a newsletter or website, etc. More details will be provided in class and on Sakai.
5. **Additional PR pieces.** This will be dependent on group size and client needs – but each individual needs to have contributed to at least one piece. More details will be provided in class and on Sakai. There are a lot of potential options for you to choose from, and several ideas follow. If you come up with another idea, please let me know! This is not a complete list!

- Collection of at least 2 testimonials
- Fact sheets
- PR plan
- Videos
- Overview of an event memo
- Web content
- Flyers
- Targeted tweet series (at least 6)
- PSAs

**Other ideas welcome!!**

**Grading of Portfolios – this will be discussed further in class**

**PR Assessment (20%)**
- Communication Audit – 20%

**Skills Work (45%)**
- Written PR Pieces – 25%
- Additional PR Pieces – 20%

**Presentation (25%)**
- Final Memo – 10%
- Final Presentation to Class - 10%
- Overall look/feel of final portfolio 5%

**Participation (10%)**
- Participation (assessed by other group members) – 10%
# Class Schedule

(Note: This is a guide for the semester, subject to change. You will be notified of any modifications.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings for the Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 7</td>
<td>Welcome! Introductory writing</td>
<td>Course syllabus (Sakai – Syllabus link); re-introduce yourself to your <em>AP Stylebook</em> – you’ll love it!</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>exercise</td>
<td>Review APPLES client options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 12</td>
<td>PR Writing: History, Tools, Strategy</td>
<td>AP Style-A Primer (textbook)</td>
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<td><em>Punctuation R Us; Why grammar stinks</em>; (Sakai);</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em><strong>Submit APPLES client preferences by beginning of class</strong></em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 14</td>
<td>Client Assignments, Discussion</td>
<td>Client Service Readings on Sakai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 19</td>
<td>NO CLASS – MLK HOLIDAY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 21</td>
<td>Research and Communication Audits PR Plans/PR Basics</td>
<td>Ch. 4, <em>Audit examples</em> (Sakai)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Mastering AP Style, Templates and Examples</em> (Sakai)</td>
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<td><em><strong>Technique Exercise 1 due at the beginning of class</strong></em></td>
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<td>Jan. 26</td>
<td>Communication Audits and PR Plans</td>
<td>WRITING EXERCISE</td>
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<td><strong>Research and Planning</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Writing for Media</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 28</td>
<td>News Basics, Advisories</td>
<td>pp.207-208; <em>Media advisory template, Advisory examples</em> (Sakai)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>WRITING EXERCISE</td>
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<td><em><strong>Service-learning agreement due – signed by you and client</strong></em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 2</td>
<td>News Releases</td>
<td>Ch. 11; Ch. 7; Boilerplates, p. 205; Other readings (Sakai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 4</td>
<td>News Releases</td>
<td>WRITING EXERCISE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 9</td>
<td>Broadcast and Streaming Media</td>
<td>Ch. 2; Ch. 15; Other readings (Sakai);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 11</td>
<td>Broadcast and Streaming Media</td>
<td>WRITING EXERCISE</td>
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<td><em><strong>Report in on client activities due (one e-mail per group is fine) – what are you working on? What will you work on? What issues are you having?</strong></em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 16</td>
<td>Editorial Page</td>
<td>Ch. 12; Other readings (Sakai)</td>
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<td><em><strong>Technique Exercise #2 due at the beginning of class</strong></em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 18</td>
<td>Editorial Page</td>
<td>WRITING EXERCISE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 23</td>
<td>Media Relations</td>
<td>Ch. 8, Ch. 6 Other readings (Sakai)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Attend Reed Surratt Lecture – Andrew Robertson, CEO, BBDO</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Date**  | **Topic** | **Readings and Assignments for the Day**
--- | --- | ---
Feb. 25 | Media relations | WRITING EXERCISE
March 2 | Incorporating visuals | *Readings on Sakai, Also questions about Midterm and clarification about course topics*
March 4 | MIDTERM EXAM | Open book, open notes

Spring Break – NO CLASS!

**Direct PR/Communication Outreach**

March 16 | Internet and social media | Ch. 9; *Other readings* (Sakai), Find a PR-related blog that you’d like to critique for class
March 18 | Internet and social media | WRITING EXERCISE
***Technique Exercise #3 due at the beginning of class***
March 23 | PRESENTATIONS ON CLIENT WORK  
*(note: this will not be graded, but will be good practice)* | *Also questions about client relations, general PR questions, clarifications about any course topics*
March 25 | Marketing and Other Comm | Ch. 3; *Facts R Us, Other readings* (Sakai)
March 30 | Marketing and Other Comm | WRITING EXERCISE
April 1 | PSAs | Ch. 13; PSA examples, *Other readings* (Sakai)  
WRITING EXERCISE
April 6 | Direct Mail | Ch. 5; BP Letter, CWS e-letter; *Direct email appeals*  
WRITING EXERCISE
April 8 | Speeches | Ch. 14; *Worst.Speech. Ever-Essential don’ts for speechwriters* (Sakai)  
WRITING EXERCISE
April 13 | PR Strategy | Readings (Sakai)
**Final Report in on client activities due (one e-mail per group is fine) –What will be in your final portfolio?**
April 15 | Portfolios, writing job cover letters | Readings (Sakai)
***Optional Technique Exercise #4 due at the beginning of class***
April 20 | NO CLASS | Work on your portfolios.
April 22 | FINAL PORTFOLIO PRESENTATIONS | *Also questions about AP Style, general PR questions, clarifications about any course topics for final*

**Group portfolio due beginning of class.**

May 5 | Take-home exams posted on Sakai at 8 a.m., due by 2 p.m.