

JOMC 732-Graduate Level Public Relations Writing - Spring 2014

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Classroom: 268 Carroll Hall
Time: MW 10:30-11:45 a.m.

Office hours: MW 3-5 pm; T 10:30-noon and 2-4; Thursday
10:30-noon; and by appointment



Course Overview: This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and a service-learning class. For graduate students, there are two components: A news writing module during the first half of the semester and a public relations writing throughout the semester.

The **news writing module** will be accomplished through readings and exercises that you may submit electronically via Sakai (Assignments or Drop box) or by email (lboynton@email.unc.edu).

Module Objectives: By the end of the module, students should be able to

- Understand what constitutes newsworthiness and how media operate;
- Effectively use AP style in writing news stories;
- Write effective news stories that are ethical and legal and free of stereotypes and biases

Public Relations Writing: 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, features, speeches, 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.***

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>. 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.

Prerequisites: Graduate students should complete JOMC 730, Public Relations Foundations.

Required Texts: *The PR Styleguide: Formats for Public Relations Practice* by Barbara Diggs-Brown, 3rd ed.; *The Associated Press Stylebook*; and Jan Johnson Yopp and Katherine C. McAdams, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, 6th ed. 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 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.

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!

News writing module: To make things as painless as possible, we’ll do the bulk of this module electronically. I’m available to speak with you in person, too, but I don’t want to require a formal class meeting unless the group finds it useful.

There will be 1-2 assignments per week for six weeks beginning the week of Jan. 20. They’re due on Fridays by 4 p.m. – you may submit them electronically via email at lboynton@email.unc.edu or drop them by my office (Carroll 237). By the following Monday or Tuesday, I will provide you with feedback on your assignments, tips for moving forward and a summary of the next portion of the module. Piece of cake, right?!

Assignments must be typewritten; assignments not typewritten will be docked 30 points. In the “real world,” computer glitches and printing problems happen but are not excused. Leave yourself plenty of time to cope with these problems and still make your deadline.

Assignments and Deadlines: All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced and turned in on time. For outside assignments, late papers (anything after 10:30 a.m.) will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree before the assignment is due that it can be late. Otherwise the assignment will receive an F. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline.

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. Our client this semester is Reese News Lab here at the j-school (<http://reesenewslab.org/>). 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 an online portfolio. The APPLES experience is valuable in that it provides professional pieces for your portfolio and gives you experience in client relations work in the professional realm.

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 filed under the Syllabus folder, and assignments will be posted in the Assignments folder (how original!).

Exams: You’ll get to enjoy two exams – a midterm and a final. The midterm exam will be a 75-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 AB.

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

In-class assignments	30%	Grading scale for reporting final grade: H = High Pass (95+) P = Pass (80-94) L = Low Pass (60-79) F = Fail (<60)
Client assignments	30%	
Midterm exam	15%	
Final exam	15%	
Participation (class/client)	10%	

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.

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>.

Diversity: The University's policy statements on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination are outlined in the 2012-2013 Undergraduate Bulletin, <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/intro.html>. 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 Learning Center website at <http://learningcenter.unc.edu/ldadhd-services/> or call 919-962-3782.

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 School's, news writing course 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 first 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 print 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!
- For in-class assignments only, edit on your hard copy. Use the standard proofreading marks given in *The Associated Press Stylebook*. I must be able to read your changes!

Out-of-class assignments (mostly for client):

- 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.
- Assignments must be typewritten; assignments not typewritten will be docked 30 points. In the "real world," computer glitches and printing problems happen but are not excused – the same is true in this classroom. Leave yourself plenty of time to cope with these problems and still make your deadline.
- 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 rewrite any assignment (in class or out of class) that receives a grade of 60 or lower. The rewrite is due no later than one week after you receive the assignment back, no later than the beginning of the 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 (Look familiar??)

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 average the two scores for each assignment.

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 gathered and used
- +2 to +10 for excellence in determining targeting strategy
- 2 to -5 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
- 10 for failure to include phone number, address, etc., of your organization or your client's organization

II. Mechanics

- 5 for each error or inconsistency in style
- 2 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**; -10 for each subsequent misspelling of a proper name

III. Research/Gathering Information

- +/-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
- +/-15 for addressing material to appropriate publics
- +/-15 for making the message or statement clear (i.e., a news peg; inclusion of key message)

Note: Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance.

Service Learning and Client Portfolio

This semester's service-learning experience will involve working with Reese News Lab, here at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (<http://reesenewslab.org/>). There are a number of relevant materials you might develop for our client – **particularly** if you take the initiative and use your growing knowledge of strategic communication to help your organization.

You may work individually or with other classmates on any aspects of client activities. It's your call, but it is imperative that you begin now to determine how you want to contribute.

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 online portfolio. Much class time will be spent discussing these assignments, and more handouts will follow.

Step one – Building an Online Portfolio.

If you haven't created a website/online portfolio, this is the semester to do it! There are a number of free web creation sites – Wordpress, Wix, Weebly, among others. Resources on Sakai may help you as you develop this portal.

Step two – At the end of the semester, **Your Online Portfolio** should include:

1. An updated **resume** (including your service-learning work for this semester)
2. A 1-2 page **reflection essay** – How did this experience contribute to your education and preparation for the real world? What was the most-valuable part of your service-learning experience? Most challenging? Least valuable? What recommendations would you make to the client regarding its PR efforts?
3. **Final time sheet** – You may create your own to track volunteer hours, or use the APPLIES form: <http://ccps.unc.edu/files/2012/10/SLC-Course-Timelog-Form.pdf>
4. A **Communication Audit** (See Assignment link on Sakai for details) should provide an up-to-date overview of the Reese News Lab's communications, including background, SWOT/situational analysis, and recommendations. Your report should be developed through discussions with the client, fellow students and the instructor, and through an assessment of its current communication materials/vehicles. The report will run about 5 pages. You may work independently or with a classmate.
5. **Profile** – there are 17 students involved with Reese News Lab this semester, and two faculty. Ample opportunity to create profiles about their work with the Lab, how they found out about it, what advantages it offers them, etc. Your profile may run 2-4 pages. Please also get a photo of your profilee!
6. **E-FAQ or Fact sheet** – What questions might a student, funder or user have about Reese News Lab? What facts can be helpful?
7. **Optional piece** – you must also do at least one optional piece for your portfolio. 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!

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|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| - 4 testimonials | - Direct mail letter | - Website updates |
| - 1-2 minute informational video | - Media list | - Flyer on event/activity |
| - News release | - Media advisory | - Tweet series (at least 6) |
| - Broadcast release | - PowerPoint with script | - Persuasion platform |
| - Letter to the editor | - Brochure | - 2 blog posts |
| - Fact sheet or FAQ | - Media relations guide | - 2 PSAs |
| - Linked In page/materials | - Facebook posts (4) | - Event materials |

Other ideas welcome!!

Class Schedule

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

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings and Assignments for the Day</u>
Jan. 8	Welcome! Introductory writing	Course syllabus (Sakai – Syllabus link); re-introduce exercise yourself to your <i>AP Stylebook</i> – you’ll love it!
Jan. 13	Research	<i>Ten tips for creating effective online surveys; The age of influencers; Introducing Share Tally; Punctuation R Us; Why grammar stinks; (Sakai); AP Style-A Primer (textbook)</i>
Technique Exercise 1 due at the beginning of class		
Jan. 15	Visit to Reese News Lab – John Clark, executive producer, Reese News Lab We will meet in the lab	<i>There’s one good thing about the newspaper industry decline; Jeff Bezos on newspapers, media and innovation; Online News Association – Just the Apps, Ma’am; compare the Reese News Lab site (http://reesenewslab.org/) with another innovative lab (see spreadsheet)</i>
Jan. 20 – No class! We will observe Martin Luther King Day		
Jan. 22	Communication Audits	Ch. 4, Hallmark’s Communication Audit, OCPYC audit; (Sakai)
Jan. 27	Fact sheets/FAQs	<i>Mastering AP Style, Facts R Us; fact bio – Annie Godwin (Sakai); How to write a great FAQ page</i>
Jan. 29	News basics, advisories	pp.207-208; <i>Writing and distributing a media advisory; Media advisory format; Advisory examples; CRAAP Test (Sakai)</i>
OPTIONAL - Technique Exercise #2 due at the beginning of class		
Feb. 3	News releases	Ch. 11; news release format; news release examples; <i>Press release advice; 10 common mistakes in writing press releases; (Sakai)</i>
Feb. 5	Boilerplates and media lists	Ch. 7; Boilerplates, p. 205; safe harbor statements, Boilerplate examples; <i>How to manage edits from the legal and executive teams</i>
Extra Credit – Fog Index Assignment		
Feb. 10	Again with the news releases!	<i>Is the press release dead? ; SEO and press releases; Generate awareness (Sakai)</i>
Post (on Sakai Forum) at least one thing that helps you understand news innovation issues		
Feb. 12	Incorporating visuals	Ch. 6; <i>Pinterest 101: A how-to guide; Digital PR tips for earned media: Use multimedia to tell the story; 3 creative ways brands are using Pinterest; Photo cutline tips; Photo caption format; photo release form (Sakai)</i>
Feb. 17	Media relations	Ch. 8; <i>Eight ground rules when working with reporters; Media relations – Satisfries; Media catching brief sheet; browse the Help a Reporter Out site (Sakai)</i>

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings and Assignments for the Day</u>
Feb. 19	Blogs, tweets, etc.	Ch. 9; <i>Top 5 blogging mistakes</i> ; <i>Top 10 best practices for blogging</i> ; <i>5 creative ways to drive more traffic to your blog posts</i> ; Find a PR-related blog that you'd like to critique
Feb. 24	Blogs, part two	<i>14 social media predictions for 2014</i> ; <i>Return of the Twinkie</i> , <i>Blog post promotion tips</i> (optional) ***Post (on Forum) at least one thing that helps you understand news innovation issues***
Feb. 26	Portfolios, writing job cover letters	Items for Portfolios; <i>15 top tips for a successful PR career</i> ; <i>Resume Summaries</i> ; <i>4 reasons why you need an online portfolio</i> ; <i>Congratulations PR graduate!</i> ; <i>Building personal brands</i> ; <i>Job interview cheat sheet</i> ; UNC Career Services Web page- letters (Sakai)
March 3	Broadcast and streaming media	Ch. 2; <i>Writing for the Ear</i> ; <i>Broadcasting style tips</i> (Sakai)
March 5	Midterm exam (ewww!!)	Open book, open notes
Spring Break! Starts 5 p.m. March 7 and runs through Sunday, March 16. Enjoy!!		
March 17	More broadcast	Ch. 15; VNR examples Homework: Go online to prnewswire.com and select a video (or multimedia) news release to share
March 19	PSAs	Ch. 13; PSA examples; <i>The striking nonprofit PSA Super Bowl ad you didn't see</i> (Sakai). Browse through Sound Cloud
March 24	Letters to the editor	Ch. 12; letter to the editor examples; <i>Diversity deficit in broadcasting continues</i> ; <i>Rivalry for a good cause</i> (Sakai)
March 26	Direct mail letters	Ch. 5; BP Letter (Sakai)
March 31	Direct mail letters, part 2	Direct e-mail appeals; CWS e-letter; Direct mail – poor letter SECU Family House letter (Sakai)
April 2	Features	Feature facts, <i>Receiving the gift of life</i> ; <i>Lack of computer access a major hurdle for the poor</i> ; <i>Food stylists...</i> , <i>Startling slip-ups in safety</i> (Sakai)
April 7	Feature pitch or catch	Pitch tips; Feature pitch-GQ (Sakai)
April 9	Persuasion platform	<i>Program Writing</i> (Sakai); Highway Safety Research Center platform (Sakai); Also – please listen to speech by Dr. Dan Ariely (page down a bit for video)
April 14	Speeches	Ch. 14; <i>Giving to Piedmont Gives Hope</i> ***Persuasion Platform due at the beginning of class***
April 16	More speaking	<i>Worst. Speech. Ever-Essential don'ts for speechwriters</i> (Sakai)
April 21	Portfolio day – no formal class session – work on your portfolios. 😊	
April 23	LDOC! And... (drumroll)... portfolios!! You may provide me with a link to your online portfolio	
May 2	Take-home exam (eww ²) due by <u>noon</u> , my office. Early papers cheerfully accepted. 😊	