

Course Syllabus

PR Writing

| Fall 2016 |

MEJO 232-003 (12042)
Twitter Hashtag: #MJPR3
Carroll Hall, Room 268
Mondays | Wednesdays
12:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

Course Description

Students will engage critically with all aspects of public relations writing. Active practice and learning will include both in-class and homework assignments that target a myriad of mass communication mediums, including today's social and digital environment. Focused concepts will include ethical decision-making surrounding public relations and media relations, and of course, AP Style.

Instructor Information

Jennifer L. Harker
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Office Location: Carroll Hall 365
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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

I offer open office hours every Wednesday from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. If you would like to meet with me outside of those times, please email and include two different times and days you are available. I am also available via email from 9 a.m. – 9 p.m., except on Fridays.

Textbook requirements: *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice (3rd Edition)*, by Barbara Diggs-Brown. Additional readings and resources will be available on Sakai or distributed in class as handouts. Also, please follow @APStylebook on Twitter.

Course Requirements

This is a mid-level mass communication skills course. Students wanting to enroll in this class should be familiar with the basic principles of mass communication, news writing, and public relations. You **MUST** have taken and passed the introductory courses MEJO 137: News Writing and MEJO 153: Principles of Advertising and Public Relations.

APPLES Service Learning Component

This course includes a minimum 30-hour service-learning component. Service-learning courses provide hands-on practice in developing multiplatform communication tools used by public relations practitioners.

Course Objectives

1. Students will learn and practice the many writing styles that professional public relations practitioners utilize.

2. Students will learn and be able to identify the many different types of internal and external communication and how to best write for each medium.
3. Students will learn how to write on deadline and still capture and convey big picture thoughts and ideas.
4. Students will learn how to work with a client on a professional public relations plan.
5. Students will learn how to conduct a communication audit, assess reputational threats, and produce communicative tools to help keep a client's reputation intact.
6. Students will learn how to write for a wide variety of publics and will practice extensive media relations skills.

Topic Areas

Some topical areas we will cover in this PR Writing course:

- News Releases, VNRs, and PSAs
- Organizational Communication
- Electronic Media Writing
- Fundraising, Direct Mail, and Annual Reports
- Persuasion, Speechwriting, and Pitches
- Media Relations, Media Lists, Media Advisories, and Press Kits
- Peer editing and group work sessions, too!

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Classroom/Homework Assignments	30 percent
Midterm Exam	15 percent
Client Portfolio	30 percent
Final Exam	15 percent
Course Participation	10 percent
Total:	100 percent

Grade scale

Grades are not rounded. A [100-90]; B [89.99-80]; C [79.99-70]; D [69.99-60]; F [59.99-0]

NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR FULL CREDIT IN THIS COURSE (barring *extreme* circumstances that are well communicated to the instructor in advance). Your media-related profession will be driven by deadlines. Extensions do not equate success in this fast paced profession. Instead, good time management skills equal success. Your ability to meet deadlines will be one way in which your professional reputation will be consistently assessed.

Classroom expectations: Please come to class prepared and ready to engage in discussion. This will be a discussion heavy course. Completion of homework assignments is imperative to successful participation in the classroom discussions. Course participation will be recorded and does count toward your semester grade.

Guidelines for Grading of Assignments

I will adhere to the University's grading standards and well as the grading rubrics developed within the School of Media and Journalism. The MJ School guidelines are as follows:

In-class assignments:

- Ample time will be given in class to work on in-class assignments. You are expected to complete all in class assignments within the allotted time.

Good writers write; so you will be given plenty of opportunities to perfect your speed and writing skills. This is a skill that takes much practice. Be patient with yourself.

- A 10-minute warning and then a 5-minute warning will be given in class as time runs out. Please ensure you leave enough time to proofread before turning in the assignment: spell check, review your 5Ws+H, double check to ensure that your formatting and word usage is appropriate. Do not wait until the last moment to print your copy. NO last minute HANDWRITTEN EDITS on assignments are to be turned in to me.
- We will use the standard proofreading marks from the *Associated Press Stylebook* for AP style quizzes, in-class editing assignments and all other edited works.

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

- All homework and out-of-class assignments are to be printed and handed to me at the *beginning* of class on the date the assignment is due.
- Assignments must be typewritten; assignments not typewritten will be docked 50 points. Would you really hand someone a handwritten news release or brochure these days?
- Out-of-class assignments should be turned in as pristine examples of PR Writing's finest. There should be no handwritten edits on the hard copy.

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.

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. Any mistakes missed the first time will be deducted on the second read. Proofread carefully!

Grading Criteria for All Assignments

There are two components to each of your grades: *Strategy*, which addresses appropriateness and accuracy of the content and approach; and *Technique*, which addresses spelling, grammar, punctuation, AP style and other formatting issues. The two scores for each assignment will be averaged to produce that assignment's final grade.

I. Writing (*Strategy*)

- +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
- 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 (*Technique*)

- 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 (more precise *Strategy*)

- +/-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; key message)

Note: Many of the plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance. Please note that MS Word spell check does not reliably catch spelling errors in ALL CAPS TXET. Proof your work, always!

APPLES Service Learning and Client Portfolio

You will be asked to partner with a classmate(s) and serve as a communication consultant for a local nonprofit. You will prepare several communication pieces, some as a team and others independently. This activity will allow you to gain experience in a nonprofit setting that is valuable both to you as a student and to the community of which you are a part. The class is designed to have you become a working member of the organization and to reflect on what that means to your educational experience as a public relations student and aspiring media professional. You will work with a client who is eager to use your skills. Remember: you are the PR professional and they are relying on your expertise. You also will develop client contact skills, which are essential for professional development. Be sure to include this experience on your resume and include any clips in your portfolio. Please spend time with your client going over assignments. Your supervisor should know what to expect from you at the end of the semester – no surprises! Periodically, I will request feedback from you and from the client. If you have questions or concerns, feel free to review the [online APPLES tutorial](#) or contact an APPLES service-learning specialist directly to make this a positive learning experience.

The Portfolio you turn in at the end of the semester 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 public relations efforts?
3. **Final time sheet** – see: <http://www.unc.edu/apples/students/courses/index.html#Forms>
4. A **Communication Audit** (see Ch. 4) should provide an up-to-date overview of your nonprofit's communications activities, including background, issues, client survey, survey analysis, SWOT/situational analysis, product/service description, implementation methods, and evaluation strategies. Your report should be developed through discussions with people at your nonprofit and through an assessment of its current communication materials/vehicles. The report will run an average of 15-20 pages.
5. The **Print News Release** may be either a hard news release (1 to 2 pages) or a feature news release (3 to 4 pages). The topic of the release is up to you and the client.
6. The **Public Relations Plan** should reflect a comprehensive, multimedia strategy to secure additional positive positioning and media coverage for your client. *The PR Plan should highlight a campaign period between 6 to 12 months.*
7. Additionally, working with the client, **prepare pieces of the client's choice**. These pieces *must total at least four points and must be cleared with me*. Deadlines for turning in the additional pieces will be on your week-to-week syllabus.

Suggestions for pieces and point values follow, but other ideas are welcome. Be creative and feel free to suggest other client-approved projects for consideration.

<p>1 point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> news release PSA letter to editor media advisory direct mail piece pitch letter flier media list update fact/info sheet promotional letter 	<p>2 points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> web page update feature series table-top display newsletter design backgrounder media list (from scratch) company or donor list bulletin board display PowerPoint with script social media site(s) setup & updates 	<p>3 points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> brochure (design and text) special event plan promotional video website, from scratch
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Attendance: You are expected to come to class and show up *on time*. Excessive tardiness will not be tolerated. Of course, there are times when we fall short on our daily duties. We are human. You each get one free pass over the course of the semester to be late or to miss a class meeting but after that one pass your absences *will* affect your final grade. Our in-class assignments are important and count as a large portion of your grade. If you are not present, you will receive a zero for that day’s assignment. University-approved absences will not count against your absence tally or any reduction of your grade but you will be asked to makeup your work in these instances. If absences become chronic, you will be asked to provide proof for your absence that it falls under those specified reasons of being university approved (e.g. NCAA, etc.).

COURSE SCHEDULE

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings/Assignments</i>
Aug. 24	Semester Overview	Syllabus AP Stylebook <i>First in class assignment + 5Ws&H</i> Read AP Style Primer: pp. 112-116
Aug. 29	Field Trip Day	Meet at Writing Center (short day) Located at lower level of SASB North Read Chapter 8, Media Tours *Homework assignment on Sakai
Aug. 31	The ART of the PITCH, Boilerplates, and a nut graf	Guest pitch from SUCCEED Read Toolbox pp. 205, 211 Boilerplate assignment in class
Sept. 5	NO CLASS	LABOR DAY HOLIDAY
Sept. 7	APPLES Client Introductions	APPLES Module (link on Sakai) Portfolio Overview

Sept. 12	News Releases	Read Chapter 11 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Sept. 14	[More] News Releases	Peer edits (<i>extra credit op. opens</i>)
Sept. 19	Media Advisories/Alerts	Readings on Sakai, and pp. 207 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Sept. 21	Media Relations Media Kits	Read Chapters 6 and 7 Peer edits Group work

***Service-learning agreement due – signed by you and client (Keep copies for final portfolio) Form at:
<http://www.unc.edu/apples/students/courses/index.html#Forms>

Sept. 26	Communication Audits	Read Chapter 4 *SWOT Homework (on Sakai)
Sept. 28	Writing to Diverse Audiences	Readings on Sakai Guest Speaker (International PR) *Fact Sheet Assignment Due (see Sakai)
Oct. 3	Brochures Direct Mail	Read Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Oct. 5	Newsletters Annual Reports	Read Chapters 1 and 10 Writing exercise, Peer edits
Oct. 10	Photography Visuals	Readings on Sakai *Homework assignment on Sakai
Oct. 12	VNRs	Read Chapter 15 Group work

*** Client assignment #1 due – Communication Audit and updated Time Sheet

Oct. 17	Broadcast Radio	Read Chapter 2 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Oct. 19	PSAs Midterm Review	Read Chapter 13 Group PSA Project
Oct. 24	MIDTERM EXAM	Open book, open notes; PR Writing exercise
Oct. 26	Electronic/New Media	Read Chapter 9 In class group social media audit

Oct. 31	Websites E-Mail	Read Chapter 16 pp. 205
Nov. 2	Writing for the Web	In-class e-release group exercise
	<i>*No office hours today.</i>	
	*** Client assignment #2 due – News Release and updated Time Sheet	
Nov. 7	Letter to the Editor Op-Eds	Read Chapter 12 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Nov. 9	PR Ethics Relationships	Readings on Sakai AP Style Quiz #1 Due
	<i>*No office hours today.</i>	
Nov. 14	Features Pitches and Targets	Readings on Sakai *Homework assignment on Sakai
Nov. 16	Internal Communication	Read pp. 206 In class group assignment
Nov. 21	Deadlines, Deadlines, Deadlines	Readings Assignment on Sakai
	*** Client assignment #3 due – Public Relations Plan and updated Time Sheet	
Nov. 23	NO CLASS	HAPPY THANKSGIVING!
Nov. 28	Persuasion	Readings on Sakai *Homework assignment on Sakai
Nov. 30	Speeches News Conferences	Read Chapter, pp. 209 In-class group assignment
Dec. 7	Review	Review *AP Style Quiz #2 Due in Class
Dec. 12	NO CLASS	Use class time to finish portfolio
	<i>*I will be available for office hours and regularly scheduled class time.</i>	
	**FINAL COPY OF CLIENT PORTFOLIO DUE BY MIDNIGHT (see Page 5 of this syllabus for items to include)	
Dec. 14	NO CLASS	University Reading Day
Dec. 16	*** Final Exam ~ DUE by 4 p.m.***	Printed and dropped off (CH 365)

Final Exam Assignment Will Become Available on Sakai at 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 13, 2016.

Open book/open notes; *read the grading rubric carefully* (on Sakai).

ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT RESOURCES

UNC-CH Honor Code: You are expected to conduct yourself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://www.catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/>). All academic work should be completed with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own original work in this course. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or the MJ School's Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help: If you need individual assistance, it is your responsibility to seek out help by meeting with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of any problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, an illness, or another unforeseen complication. Communication is key!

Diversity: UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and 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. Students in this class are expected to respect each other no matter our individual differences.

Special Accommodations: If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disability accessibility, please visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/accommodations> for a list of available accommodations.

ACCREDITATION: The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

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