

Course Syllabus

Public Relations Writing

| Fall 2017 |

MEJO 332-002 (10390)

Carroll Hall, Room 283 | Tuesdays & Thursdays | 3:30 p.m. – 4:45 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: Tuesdays | Thursdays, 1:30 – 3 p.m.

I offer open office hours every Tuesday and every Thursday before class. If you would like to meet with me outside of these times, please email me to request a meeting and include two different times and dates you are available. Please allow at least 24 hours advance notice for scheduling. I am also available via email from 9 a.m. – 9 p.m., except on Sundays or when traveling. Again, please allow 24 hours for a response.

Textbook requirements:

- *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice (3rd Edition)*, by Barbara Diggs-Brown.
- *The Associated Press Stylebook 2017*

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.

Plagiarism

Automatic zero.

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

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Classroom/Homework Assignments	40 percent
Midterm Exam	15 percent
Client Portfolio	20 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 documented and 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. Your ability to meet deadlines will be one way in which your professional reputation will be consistently assessed. Manage your time.

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

My Guidelines for Grading Your 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 your client work):

- All homework and out-of-class assignments are to be turned in on Sakai before the *beginning* of class on the date the assignment is due. The Sakai drop box will close at class time. Some assignments will be printed and peer edited in class so we can practice handwritten edits on a hard copy. In-class assignments also should be turned in via Sakai.
- 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.

Rewrites: You may rewrite any assignment that receives a grade of 60 or lower. The rewrite is due no later than one week after you received the graded assignment, and 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 doubly deducted on the second read. Proofread carefully!

Grade Advocacy: As a PR professional you will need to know how to advocate for your budget, your employees or interns, and for your other interests on the job. It is for this reason that I encourage you to advocate for your grade if you think I have graded an assignment unfairly. *The rules:* you must wait 24 hours after receipt of grade and make a good case with a clear explanation. Before, after or during class are not appropriate times for this exchange, so please deliver your grade advocacy to me via office hours, email or a scheduled appointment.

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.

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 expectations and 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 about you. 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.

A FULL Portfolio is due at the end of the semester. It should include:

1. An **updated resume** (include 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? How has this experience shaped you?
3. **Final time sheet** – see: <http://www.unc.edu/apples/students/courses/index.html#Forms>
Also available on Sakai.
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. An exemplar is available on Sakai.
5. A **Print Media 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 before completion*. Deadlines for turning in these additional pieces will be on your week-to-week syllabus. Your News

Engagement Day assignment does not count toward these points (it is a homework grade) but that assignment should be included in your portfolio.

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. Client needs are especially important in choosing these projects.

1 point	2 points	3 points
news release	web page update	brochure (design and text)
PSA	feature series	special event plan
letter to editor	table-top display	promotional video
media advisory	newsletter design	website, from scratch
direct mail piece	backgrounder	
pitch letter	media list (from scratch)	
flyer	company or donor list	
media list update	bulletin board display	
fact/info sheet	PowerPoint with script	
promotional letter	social media site(s) setup & updates	

Attendance: You are expected to come to *every* class meeting 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.).

Social Media Assignments: Many of the semester's assignments will include a social media component. **YOU WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO USE YOUR PERSONAL ACCOUNT(S) FOR THESE ASSIGNMENTS.** I prefer you keep your online privacy intact. There are reputation transfer matters to consider on this topic as well, which we will discuss in class. Instead, each assignment will include explicit instructions on what is expected for the social media component of assignments. If you have any questions, please ask.

Shared Class Notes: I suggest as classmates you support each other by creating a Google doc of course notes. This is not mandatory but could be beneficial, especially for those of you working in teams for clients. There will be no standard test given in this class, so this running document will make no difference for test grades.

Writing Center: The UNC-CH Writing Center is a great resource for this class. Make an appointment and check out all the services they offer: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings/Assignments</i>
Aug. 22	Semester Overview	Syllabus AP Stylebook <i>First in class assignment + 5Ws&H</i> HW: Read AP Style Primer: pp. 112-116 HW: Read Toolbox pp. 205, 211
Aug. 24	The ART of the PITCH, Boilerplates, and nut grafs	Practice your pitch Discuss readings Boilerplate assignment in class
Aug. 29	Media Releases	Read Chapter 11 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Aug. 31	APPLES Client Introductions	APPLES Module (link on Sakai) Portfolio Overview Professional email communication
Sept. 5	Media Advisories Alerts	Readings on Sakai, and pp. 207-208 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Sept. 7	Social Media PR e-Releases	Readings on Sakai *Homework assignment on Sakai
Sept. 12	Media Relations Media Kits Fact Sheets	Read Chapters 6 and 7 Group work
Sept. 14	Communication Audits	Read Chapter 4 *SWOT Homework (on Sakai)
Sept. 19	PR Ethics Relationships	Readings on Sakai In-class group exercise
<p>***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</p>		
Sept. 21	Brochures Direct Mail	Read Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Sept. 26	FIRST AMENDMENT DAY Report to the Freedom Forum Conference Center by 3:30 p.m. [3 rd floor, Carroll Hall]	Readings on Sakai ~ #uncfree
<p>**Your attendance will count as an in-class assignment grade – <i>sign the attendance sheet!</i>**</p>		

Sept. 28	Websites E-Mail Wikipedia	Read Chapter 16 + pp. 205 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Oct. 3	NEWS ENGAGEMENT DAY Photography Visuals	NewsEngagement.org Group work in class
Oct. 5	Writing for nonprofits Fundraising	Readings on Sakai Group work
Oct. 10	VNRs Broadcast Radio	Read Chapter 15 and Chapter 2 Group work *Homework on Sakai
Oct. 12	Digital Influencers	Readings on Sakai Group assignment
Oct. 17	Social Media	Read Chapter 9 In class group social media audit *Homework assignment on Sakai

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

Oct. 19	FALL BREAK	NO CLASS
Oct. 24	Creativity in PR PR Plan Overview	In-class Creative Writing Practice Review Exemplars on Sakai
Oct. 26	PSAs Midterm Review	Read Chapter 13 Group PSA Project
Oct. 31	MIDTERM EXAM	No readings today.
Nov. 2	Writing for the Web	Readings on Sakai In-class group exercise

*** Client assignment #2 due – Media Release and updated Time Sheet

Nov. 7	Letter to the Editor Op-Eds	Read Chapter 12 *Homework assignment on Sakai
Nov. 9	Annual Reports Newsletters	Read Chapters 1 and 10 Writing exercise
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 Persuasion Readings on Sakai
*Homework assignment on Sakai

*** Client assignment #3 due – Public Relations Plan and updated Time Sheet

Nov. 23 **NO CLASS** HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Nov. 28 Deadlines, Deadlines, Deadlines Readings | Assignment on Sakai
*No office hours today

Nov. 30 Speeches | News Conferences Read Chapter, pp. 209
In-class group assignment

Dec. 5 Review Review

**FINAL COPY OF CLIENT PORTFOLIO DUE BY MIDNIGHT
(see pages 5-6 of this syllabus for items to include)

Dec. 7 **NO CLASS** University Reading Day
*I will be available for office hours and regularly scheduled class time.

Dec. 14 *****Final Exam** ~ DUE by 4 p.m.*** Dropbox on Sakai

Final Exam Assignment Will Become Available on Sakai at 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 6, 2016.
Open book/open notes; read the grading rubric carefully (on Sakai).

ALL DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

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. You also may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

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 at all times no matter our individual differences.

The School of Media and Journalism adopted Diversity and Inclusion Mission and Vision statements in spring 2016 with accompanying goals. This classroom is expected to practice the tenets set forth in the School of Media and Journalism's diversity vision statement:

- Create and maintain an environment that promotes civic participation, values understanding of each other's backgrounds and experiences, and practices inclusion of all individuals.
- Create and maintain a climate that offers equality of opportunities and plurality of thought and that supports the First Amendment's commitment to the marketplace of ideas.
- Cultivate mindfulness of the unconscious biases we all have and of institutional inequalities that can threaten progress within the school.
- Provide classrooms that are and remain accessible to all students and faculty.

Please visit, <http://www.mj.unc.edu/diversity-and-inclusion> for more information.

For more information on university-wide diversity and inclusion efforts and resources for undergraduate students, please visit: <http://diversity.unc.edu/>.

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.

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! Office hours are available twice weekly.

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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