

School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

JOMC 232.2 “Public Relations Writing”— Spring 2014

Professor Napoleon Byars

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Classroom: CA Halls of Fame Room

Meeting Time: MW at 2 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

General Requirements, Testing and Grading

Prerequisites: To take this course as an undergraduate, you must have successfully completed JOMC 137 “Principles of Advertising and Public Relations ” and JOMC 153 “News Writing.”
No exceptions.

Course Overview: This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and APPLIES service-learning class. We will cover major communication tools of the public relations trade, including PR plans, news releases, media advisories, communication audits, feature articles, speeches, pitch letters, fact sheets, public service announcements and more. *Writing skills are learned and sharpened by doing and you will have ample opportunities to learn and improve.*

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

- Quickly produce 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
- Professionally present materials
- Meet strict and sometimes multiple deadlines
- Develop and establish client relations through service learning
- Work as part of a creative team
- Develop a complete PR portfolio

Required Texts: *Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format* (8th Edition), by Thomas J. Bivins; and *The Associated Press Stylebook* (current or annotated issue). All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned to generate class discussion and ensure you’re prepared to write. Occasionally we will have pop quizzes on text material or current events. You should regularly read and watch local and national news broadcasts and follow top stories for their public relations implications and lessons learned.

Supplementary Texts: *Webster’s New World Dictionary; Please Don’t Do That – The Pocket Guide to Good Writing*, by John J. Schulz (2008). Other materials, handouts or posts on Sakai.

Laptop Computer and Supplies: You must bring your laptop to class for this course. All work should be saved and backed up regularly. If you're on deadline and experience a computer malfunction let me know to avoid late penalties on the assignment. Additionally, each student will need and maintain:

- 1) A three-ring binder with clear page protectors to keep copies of your finished work that will become part of your hard-copy portfolio.
- 2) A personal WordPress webpage (or similar personal website) for use in posting appropriate writing products throughout the semester. Some of the portfolio materials will also be posted on your webpage (we will discuss this more in detail).

Reference Materials: Use online and library reference materials to double-check accuracy.

News Content: Keep up with current events by reading *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The News & Observer* and by following other news sources, such as *National Public Radio* (91.5 FM). 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.

Assignments and Deadlines: All writing assignments must be typed, correctly formatted and turned in (or posted) on time. In the real world you don't get paid, or you can lose your job, if you are late in delivering professional products to clients. Late work will be penalized. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after deadline. I will not accept emailed assignments unless you have asked and received permission to do so.

Outside Assignments and APPLES Clients: As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work with other class members with a local nonprofit client to produce communication pieces for them. APPLES coordinators will supply a list of organizations with contact names that have requested help, from which you can choose from to volunteer your services (See Sakai). You will be expected to do periodic check-ins on the APPLES experience and meet with the instructor to discuss progress in your APPLES placement. At the end of the class, you should present your materials to your client that you worked with them to produce and keep a copy for yourself.

The APPLES experience is valuable in that it provides professional pieces for your portfolio and gives you experience in working in the nonprofit realm. Do not forget, however, that you are representing the University in general and the public relations sequence in particular in the community. Professionalism is expected at all times.

Sakai: I encourage you to use the Sakai Discussion Board feature to discuss client issues among your peers. This is an effective way to ask questions, find out who faces similar challenges/opportunities and share successes.

Exams: Two exams (a midterm and a final) will be given. The midterm will be a 25-question multiple-choice exam. The final exam will be a 75-minute writing exercise.

Book Review:

Each student must also read and complete a book review on the topic of public relations for

publication on their student blog. Book selections must be approved in advance by the professor in order to satisfy the requirement. Book reviews should be typed, double spaced and approximately 400 words in length. Don't forget to include a recommendation on whether or not the book is appropriate for young communicators just starting out in public relations. Additionally, the book review must be read, peer reviewed (edited) and initialed by at least one other student in the class prior to turn in.

Course Grade Calculation: Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

In-class assignments	20%	Grading Scale	
Book review	10%	A=100-93	C+=79-77
Client assignments	20%	A-= 92-90	C=76-73
Midterm exam	15%	B+=89-87	C-=72-70
Final exam	15%	B=86-83	D+=69-67
Participation & attendance	20%	B-=82-80	D=66-60
Total	100%		F=Below 60

Attendance: Regular, on-time class attendance is a student obligation. You are responsible for all work including quizzes, tests and written work for all class meetings. It is your responsibility to request makeup assignments or class notes missed because of absence. Note: quizzes cannot be made up.

Honor Code:

It is expected that each student 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, which includes outside writing assignments. Use of former students' writing assignments constitutes a breach of the honor code and will be dealt with accordingly. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see me or Senior Associate Undergraduate Dean Chris Roush, 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 meet with me during office hours or to set up an appointment for another time. 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 the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity:

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2012-2013 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. In summary, 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 or disabilities.

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.

Guidelines for Grading Assignments

See page 7, 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 will also apply.

In-class assignments:

- Ample time will be given to work on in-class assignments.
- Give yourself time to proofread.
- For in-class assignments only, edit on your hard copy. Use the standard proofreading marks in *The Associated Press Stylebook*. I must be able to read your changes.

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

- Most assignments are due at the beginning of class time. Late assignments are docked 30 points. Assignments turned in more than 24 hours late automatically will be assigned a grade of zero.
- 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.

Missed in-class assignments:

- There are no make-ups for quizzes.
- For other missed in-class writing exercises, you may be allowed to write a two-page, double-spaced paper on a public relations topic in the news. You must notify me in writing in advance of an excused or anticipated absence (e-mail is encouraged).

Grading Criteria for All Graded 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 style formatting issues. I average the two scores for each assignment. **NOTE:** Minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors.

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, including typos
-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 sources, including level of expertise or authority
+/-5 to 20 for thoroughness of material; existence of loose ends, holes, or answered questions; development of significant angles; inclusion of needed detail
+/-5 to 15 for background research necessary to make the work complete or to provide needed
+/-20 for handling of legal matters, such as libel, violation 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)

Service Learning / Client Portfolio

You will prepare several communication pieces for a nonprofit client. 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.

Remember: You are working for a client who is eager to use your skills. Take advantage of the opportunity to develop client contact skills necessary for professional development. Be sure to write up this experience on your resume and include any clips in your portfolio. Much class time will be spent discussing these assignments, and more handouts will follow. Check Sakai for tips and other helpful hints.

Please spend time with your client going over your 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 the client. Be sure you make time to communicate.

The individual portfolio 3-ring binder you turn in on Nov. 25, 2013, should include:

- A contents page
- An updated resume (including your service-learning work for this semester) and a cover letter (see Career Services guide sample online)
- A 2-page reflection essay (double-spaced) Mention how this experience contributed to your education and preparation for the real world? What recommendations would you make to the client regarding their public relations efforts?
- Final time sheet (typed) signed by supervisor or client representative to show approximately 3 hours per week or 30 hours of client work for the semester.
- A communication audit. This should provide an up-to-date overview of your nonprofit's communications, including background issues, strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats (SWOT) situational analysis, product/service description, implementation methods, and evaluation strategies. Your report should be developed through discussions with your client and through an assessment of its current communication materials/vehicles. The report should be typed 6 pages single-spaced.
- 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.
- The broadcast news release or PSA on a topic decided by you and your client. BNR should run no more than 60 seconds; PSA should be no less than 30 seconds.

- The additional pieces you prepare for the client must total at least four points and must be cleared with me before you do them. Deadlines for turning in the additional pieces will be on your week-to-week syllabus. We can talk about any additional items or modifications as needed. See item points below:

1 point: news release, PSA letter to editor, media advisory, direct mail piece, pitch letter, flyer, media list update, fact/info sheet, promotion letter

2 points: webpage update, feature series, table-top display, newsletter design, backgrounder, media list from scratch, company or donor list, bulletin board display, PowerPoint with script

3 points: brochure (design and text), special event plan

4 points: Media relations guides, website or social media content from scratch

(Current a/o Dec. 19, 2013)