

MEJO 332 – Public Relations Writing - Fall 2019

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Classroom: 268 Carroll Hall
Time: T/Th 3:30-4:45 p.m.
Appts: Before & After Class or
By Appointment

Course Overview: This course is an applied writing skills laboratory and APPLES 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. *The skills of writing are learned by doing; you will have ample opportunities to learn and improve.*

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

- **quickly produce** accurate 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 many public relations agencies...)
- **professionally present materials in various acceptable formats,**
 - **meet strict and sometimes multiple deadlines,**
 - **develop and establish client relations** through service learning,
 - **work as part of a creative team,**
 - **and develop a complete PR portfolio.**

Prerequisites: To take this course as an undergraduate, you must have successfully completed **MEJO 153: News Writing** and **MEJO 137: Principles of Advertising and Public Relations. NO EXCEPTIONS!**

Required Texts: *The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice* (3rd Edition), by Barbara Diggs-Brown; and *The Associated Press Stylebook*. 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. You should regularly read and watch local and national news broadcasts and follow top stories.

Recommended Texts: Webster’s *New World Dictionary*; Other materials, handouts or posts on **Sakai**.

Computer Supplies: All work should be saved to a flash/jump drive or disk; or to your H-drive 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 cannot rescue or resurrect lost documents! If you’re on a class deadline and experience a computer malfunction, send the file to me via email prior to the deadline to avoid late penalties on the assignment.

Reference Materials: Use of reference materials to double-check accuracy is encouraged.

News Content: Keep up with current events by reading *The Daily Tar Heel*, Raleigh’s *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 on time. For outside assignments, late papers 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. With an excused absence, you can turn in makeup assignments for exercises missed during a regular class period. You should email the instructor to request the assignment, which will be due at the beginning of the next class period. Makeup assignments not turned in within one week of the missed class, will receive a 0 grade.

Outside Assignments and APPLES clients: As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work in tandem with classmates on behalf of a local nonprofit client to produce communication pieces for them. APPLES coordinators have supplied a list of organizations with contact names that have requested help, from which you can choose for whom you would like to volunteer your services (See Sakai). You will be expected to do periodic check-ins on the APPLES experiences and meet with the instructor to discuss progress in your APPLES placement. Due dates for client pieces you produce are on the attached week-by-week syllabus. Throughout the semester, you should present materials to your client that you worked with them to produce and present them with a complete portfolio. 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 periodically check Sakai for announcements, assignments, grades and useful handouts and class readings. Additional reading materials and all other handouts are/will be posted on Sakai for your convenience. Please consult these materials to ensure you produce quality communication tools in this class.

Exams: Two exams (a midterm and a final) will be given. The midterm exam will be a 75-minute writing exercise. The final exam will be a 3-hour writing exercise that covers the full semester. 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.

Final Exams and Deadlines: External audiences that include clients, consumers and media personnel are relying on PR practitioners to present accurate, honest and relevant content and communication – sometimes immediately, and often on stringent deadlines. For that reason, adherence to strict deadlines is a crucial component of this course. Both the midterm and the final exam are due on a “hard deadline” – meaning little to no flexibility. Failure to meet those deadlines will result in a 10-point per minute (late) deduction from the total exam grade for documents not submitted on time. Effective time management and the ability to prioritize (campaign development) during the exam period are essential. All exams are expected to be submitted on time.

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

(Since the University grading system does not calculate A+, an “A” final course grade requires a 96 or higher.)

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| In-class assignments | 30% |
| Client assignments | 30% |
| Midterm exam | 15% |
| Final exam | 15% |
| Participation (class/client) | 10% |

| | | |
|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Grading scale: | A = 90-100 | |
| | B = 80-89 | (+/-, too) |
| | C = 70-79 | |
| | D = 60-69 | |
| | F = Below 60 | |

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, class participation is lacking, and 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, do not participate in class discussions, and fail to use rewrite opportunities.

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Honor and Campus Code: It is the responsibility of each student to abide by the UNC Honor Code, which prohibits **plagiarism**, lying, cheating or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student or academic personnel acting in an official capacity; and the Campus Code, which prohibits students from significantly impairing the welfare or educational opportunities of others in the University community. If you haven't read the code in a while, please revisit it!

Attendance: Regular, on-time class attendance is a student obligation, and a student is responsible for all work—including tests and written work—for all class meetings. It is your responsibility to request makeup assignments or class notes missed because of absence. No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any given number of class meetings. **Note:** In practical terms, 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 because of an absence only upon documented proof of a reasonable excused absence. It is your responsibility to acquire class notes, missed assignments and turn in makeup work.

Special Note: If you have a condition requiring special assistance of any sort, please notify me as soon as possible so that I may help ensure your needs are met.

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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>

No single course could possibly give you 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 included in the above link.

Specifically, MEJO 332 PR Writing aligns with the following values of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and expects students to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

NOTE: *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 assistance—and want to see you succeed.*

Guidelines for Grading of Assignments

See the next sheet, which is a modified version of the MEJO 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 are expected to complete all assignments within the allotted time—as this is what’s required in the real PR profession. Good writers write; so you will be given plenty of opportunities to perfect your speed and writing skills.
- Don’t wait until the last moment to print your copy. Give yourself time to proofread. I will alert you when there are about 10 minutes remaining in class. EDIT, PROOF AND save, save, SAVE!
- Use the standard proofreading marks given in *The Associated Press Stylebook* for AP style quizzes and in-class editing assignments. NO HANDWRITTEN EDITS on assignments turned in to me.

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, type-overs, etc., will be penalized 10 points each. NO HANDWRITTEN EDITS!

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 the next class period 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. Any mistakes missed the first time will be deducted on the second read. Proofread your rewrites carefully!
- Midterm and Final exams are excluded from the Rewrite Policy.

Grading Criteria for All Assignments (Look familiar??)

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. 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. Please note that MS Word SPELLCHECKER does not reliably catch spelling errors in ALL CAPS TXET. (See, it didn't catch that one). Please proof your work!

Service Learning and Client Portfolio

You will be asked to partner with a classmate(s) and serve as a PR consultant and communication professional for a local nonprofit. You will prepare several communications pieces, some in tandem 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.

Remember: You will work with a client who is eager to use your skills. You are the PR professional, and they are relying on your expertise. You 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 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. 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/personnel/platforms. 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; and also make recommendations for social media support. The PR/Social Media 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.

| 1 point | 2 points | 3 points | OTHER IDEAS WELCOME! |
|--------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| news release | Prezi & script | brochure (design & text) | |
| PSA | feature series (3) | social media calendar & guide (6 months) | |
| letter to editor | table-top display | newsletter (design & text, 4 pages) | |
| media advisory | special event plan/budget | promotional video (<i>min. 00:60</i>) | |
| direct mail piece | backgrounder | website, from scratch | |
| pitch letter | media list from scratch (<i>25 contacts</i>) | | |
| flier | company or donor list (<i>25 contacts</i>) | | |
| media list update | bulletin board display | | |
| fact/info sheet | PowerPoint with script | | |
| promotional letter | social media site(s) setup & updates | | |

MEJO 332 PR Writing -- Class Schedule

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Readings and Assignments for the Day</u> |
|---|---|--|
| Aug. 20 | Welcome and Introductions! Course overview. Portfolio intro, APPLES, course manual(s) overview | Course syllabus; re-introduce yourself to your <i>AP Stylebook</i> – you'll need it! |
| Aug. 22 | PR Writing: History, Tools, Strategy Review APPLES client options. | Preface (<i>The PR Styleguide</i>) |
| Aug. 27 | Basics: Releases, Advisories, Fact Sheets, etc. | Chpt. 11 (News Releases) Templates and Examples (Sakai) |
| Aug. 29 | Communication Audit, planning, evaluation | Chpt. 4 (Communication Audits) APPLES; Communication Audit tips (Sakai) |
| Sept. 3 | Style and Structure; The Big Picture <i>AP Style Quiz</i> | Discussion: Research, Planning & Media Relations AP Style (A Primer, Pg. 112) Punctuation R Us, Why grammar stinks (Sakai) |
| Sept. 5 | Ethics and Law / PR Planning Process PRSA Member Code of Ethics (sign & turn in) | Discussion: Ethical & Legal Issues www.prsa.org/_About/ethics/index.asp?ident=eth1 |
| Sept. 10 | Public Relations Plans/Planning <i>Structure, Strategy, Media, Publics</i> | Appendix A – Public Communication Toolbox Pg. 204; Templates and examples (Sakai) |
| Sept. 12 | Feature Writing: Telling Stories Media & Messaging | Chpt. 10 (Newsletters) Newsletters, Magazines & Features |
| ***Service-learning agreement due – signed by you and client (<i>Keep copies for final portfolio</i>) Form at: http://www.unc.edu/apples/students/courses/index.html#Forms | | |
| Sept. 17 | Marketing Communication pieces (MarCom & Branding) | Chpt. 3 (Brochures) Brochures & Controlled Publications |
| Sept. 19 | PR Campaigns | Team Group Projects cont'd |
| Sept. 24 | PR Tools and Resources Cision, PR Newswire, etc. | Chpt. 7 (Media Lists & Media Databases) 'Beyond lists,' (Sakai) |
| Sept. 26 | Digital Newsrooms & Press Kits Multimedia Messaging & Strategy | Chpt. 16 (Websites) Class Discussion on Media Management |
| *** Client assignment #1 due – Communication Audit and updated Time Sheet | | |
| Oct. 1 | Photo captions | 'A picture is worth 1,000 words?' Photo caption tips (Sakai) |
| Oct. 3 | Public Service Announcements (PSAs) Storyboards, Script Treatments | Chpt. 13 (Public Service Ads/Announcements) Writing for the Ear; Broadcast examples (Sakai) |
| Oct. 8 | Broadcast releases; ANRs and VNRs | Chpts. 2, 15 (Audio/Video News Releases) Writing for the Ear; Broadcast examples (Sakai) |
| Oct. 10 | Broadcast releases; ANRs and VNRs | Chpts. 2, 15 (Audio/Video News Releases) |
| Oct. 15 | MIDTERM EXAM | Open book, open notes; PR Writing exercises |

**Update to VK regarding client project before break is required! -- SUBMIT UPDATED, SIGNED TIME SHEET.
FALL BREAK STARTS 5 P.M. OCT. 16 – NO CLASS THROUGH SUNDAY, OCT 20. Be safe and have fun!**

Class Schedule (cont'd)

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Readings and Assignments for the Day</u> |
|--|---|--|
| Oct. 22 | PR Strategy and Media Relations Media Q&A / Client prep & coaching | Chpt. 8 (Media Tours) Discussion: Persuasion Strategies |
| Oct. 24 | PR Strategy; Crisis Management Press Conferences | Discussion: Crisis Comm & Emergency Prep “Getting Your Message to the Media” |
| *** Client assignment #2 due – News Release and updated Time Sheet | | |
| Oct. 29 | OpEds and Letters to the Editor | Chpt. 12 (Opinion-Editorials) Letters to the Editor examples Op-Ed guidelines (Sakai) |
| Oct. 31 | Advertising and Public Relations | Class Handouts |
| Nov. 5 | Identity Packages & Portfolios | Graphic Design & Layout Discussion/Notes |
| Nov. 7 | Non-Profit/Social & Advocacy PR RFPs, Pitches and PR Proposals | Sample Campaigns (Sakai) Class Discussion |
| Nov. 12 | Speechwriting & Ghostwriting <i>Speech Delivery and Speech Cues</i> | Chpt. 14 (Speeches) Class Discussion & Notes |
| *** Client assignment #3 due – Public Relations Plan and updated Time Sheet | | |
| Nov. 14 | Annual Reports & Social Responsibility Reports PR, Social Media & Social Networking | Chpt. 1 (Annual Reports) Chpt. 9 (New Media) |
| Nov. 19 | Direct Mail & Infomercials | Chpt. 5 (Direct Mail Campaigns) Direct Mail Templates and Guidelines (Sakai) |
| Nov. 21 | RFPs and PR Proposals/Billing/Contracts | Handouts, Online sites and Class Discussion |
| Nov. 26 | Portfolios, writing job cover letters | “Items to consider,” cover letters (Sakai); UNC Career Services Web page http://careers.unc.edu/yourjobsearch/resumes_letters/ |
| Nov. 28 | NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY | |
| Dec. 3 | LAST DAY OF CLASS – PR Industry Q&A: reflect, review, reminisce, exam prep, class surveys and FINAL COPY OF CLIENT PORTFOLIO DUE (see Page 6 of syllabus for items to include) | |
| THURSDAY, DEC. 12 | FINAL EXAM – 4:00 P.M. Carroll Hall, Room 268 <i>MEJO 332, Sect. 004 (Meets weekly at 3:30 p.m. - T/Th)</i> | |