**MEJO 332, Section 2 –Public Relations Writing – Spring 2020**

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| **Instructor**:  Mike MacMillan  **Phone**: 908.868.8063 (You may text or leave a message for me.)  **Email**:  [mac1955@email.unc.edu](mailto:mac1955@email.unc.edu).  **Classroom**: CA-21  **Time**:  3:30-4:45 Tuesdays/Thursdays  **Office hours**:  On request. |  |

**Course Overview**

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 platforms, including news releases for print and broadcast, content for digital media, strategic feature pitches, speech writing, fact sheets, media advisories, public service announcements, media pitches 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

* **Identify a story’s key news elements** and write a strong lead;
* **quickly** **produce** any of the basic, professional, written materials required in the public relations profession;
* **integrate strategy** into communication pieces to target appropriate/diverse audiences and media and to advocate effectively for a cause or to communicate information on a product or service;
* **learn to present material professionally**, and
* **develop a personal, pre-professional public relations portfolio.**

**Prerequisites:** To enroll in this course as an undergraduate student, you must have successfully completed **MEJO 153: Writing and Reporting** and **MEJO 137: Principles of Advertising and Public Relations**. No exceptions.

**Required Text:** Barbara Diggs-Brown’s ***The PR Style Guide: Formats for Public Relations Practice (Third Edition)*** and***The Associated Press Stylebook (newest edition)***. An optional text is ***The SABEW Stylebook*** *(The Society of American Business Editors and Writers)* by Roush and Cloud (2012).

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:** Bring your laptop to class. All work should be saved to an external drive, your own laptop or your email. Murphy’s law is alive and well in computer labs, and snafus do occur. Save early and often – I can’t resurrect lost documents!

**Phones (calls and texts), Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram** and all other social networking activity on any device will not be tolerated in class unless the platform is part of the day’s lesson plan.

**Reference Materials:** Use of reference materials – dictionary, thesaurus to double-check accuracy—is encouraged. These materials are available in the classroom and in the Park 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. This makes you a more effective practitioner!

**Assignments and Deadlines:** All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced 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. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline without prior notice by you and confirmation by me. These will receive an F.

**Outside Assignments and APPLES clients:** As part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, you will work with a client organization as a team member to produce communication pieces. You will be expected to discuss your APPLES deliverables and client relations in class with the instructor.Failure to provide updates 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 in the professional realm.

**Sakai:** All PowerPoint slide presentations and other handouts are/will be posted on Sakai for your convenience. Please see the Resources link. Please consult these materials to ensure that you produce quality communication tools in this class. This syllabus is also filed under the Syllabus tab, and assignments will be posted in the Assignments folder.

**Exams:** You will have 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 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.

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

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| 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  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; 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 and fail to use rewrite opportunities.

**Please note**: Students who earn less than a C in the course will have to retake the class.

**Attendance:**  Regular, on-time class attendance is 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!

**Seeking Help:**  
If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to ask. 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 family or personal hardship, disability or illness.  
  
**Diversity:**  
The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2015-2016 Undergraduate Bulletin http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/. 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.  
   
**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 disabilities, visit the Accessibility Services website at https://accessibility.unc.edu/

**The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications** (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

* Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
* Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
* Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
* Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
* Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
* 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;
* Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
* Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
* Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.
* Units requesting evaluation of a graduate program must also demonstrate how their master’s graduates attain this additional core competency:
* Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

***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, through your hard work.***

**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 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. It is 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, type-overs, 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 two days after you receive the assignment back, no later than the beginning of that 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 and Exams**

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 to +10 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

-10 to -20 for missing the lead entirely or burying it

-5 for failure to include contact information on pieces

-5 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

*-10 for misspelling a proper name when the correct spelling is available to you.*

**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

+/-10 for addressing material to appropriate publics

+/-10 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**

There are a number of relevant materials you might develop for your client – **particularly** if you take the initiative and use your growing knowledge of strategic communication to help your organization.

Remember: Through service learning, you will develop client contact skills, which are essential for professional development. Be sure to include this experience on your resume and include any communication items you produced/helped create in your online portfolio.

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 website creation sites. Resources on Sakai may help you as you develop this portal. Browse some of these student examples for inspiration and as a guide:

Kylin Condrey <https://kylinmc.wixsite.com/kylinmc>

Anna Digiacomo <https://annadigiacomo.wixsite.com/website>

Emma Rolader <https://roladerem.wixsite.com/mysite>

Abigale Speight <https://abigalespeight.weebly.com>

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- to 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? What recommendations would you make to the Carolina Center for Public Service regarding this particular client as a future APPLES client/community partner?

3. **Final time sheet** – You may create your own to track volunteer hours, or use the APPLES form.

4. A **Communication Audit** is a TEAM EFFORT and should provide an up-to-date overview of your client’s communications, including background, SWOT/situational analysis, and recommendations. Your team 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 five pages.

5. **Profile** – Your profile is independent work and may run two to four pages. Please also get a photo of your profilee!

6. **FAQ or Fact sheet –** What questions might a student, potential funder or user or volunteer have about your client? What facts can be helpful? Your fact sheet is independent work.

7. **Additional piece** – You must also complete at least one additional piece as independent work for your portfolio. There is a list of possibilities below. You may also find that your client has requests of you that are not included here but may work to fill this requirement.

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| - 4 testimonials  - 1- to 2-minute info video  - News release-print  - News release-broadcast  - Letter to the editor  - Fact sheet or FAQ  - LinkedIn page/materials | - Direct mail letter  - Media list  - Media advisory  - PowerPoint with script  - Brochure  - Media relations guide  - Social media posts (4-6) | - Website updates  - Flyer on event/activity  - Speech  - 2 blog posts  - 2 PSAs  - 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.)

## **Date Topic Readings and Assignments for the Day**

January 9 Welcome! Introductions. Definition of public relations. What’s

expected. Guest speakers. Review of syllabus. APPLE case history discussion.

Assignment: read pages 207-208 in the PR Style Guide (Media Advisories/Media Alerts). Draft a media alert regarding Matt Winkler’s presence at the school next week.

January 14 Guest speaker – Matt Winkler, Room CA-11 during regularly scheduled class time.

editor-in-chief emeritus,

Bloomberg News

Assignment: review Chapter 11 in the PR Style Guide. Be prepared to draft a short press release on Matt Winkler’s presentation.

January 16 Format and Style Discuss AP Style.

Assignment: read Chapter 4 in the PR Style Guide. Open-book, take home AP Style test.

January 21 Intro to APPLES and clients Team assignments. Discuss on-boarding. Begin audit

research.

Assignment: Continue work on audit. Read Chapter 11 in the PR Style Guide.

January 23 Press releases. Uses and structure. Press release writing. Identifying

the lead. Boilerplates and headings.

Assignment: complete press release started in class.

January 28 Q&As The Most Interesting Person in the World

Assignment: complete Q&A based on in-class work. Identify one survey-based news story and come to class prepared to discuss.

January 30 Surveys Discuss the uses of surveys. Create a survey press

release.

Assignment: complete the survey press release. Read Chapter 12 in PR Style Guide. Identify on an op-ed you think does a particularly good job of advancing and argument and come to class prepared to discuss.

February 4 Op-Eds Discuss the use of opinion pieces.

Assignment: write an op-ed. Read Chapter 13 in the PR Style Guide.

February 6 Non-Profit Communications Guest Speaker: Susan Ross

Moss & Ross. APPLES update.

Assignment: read chapter 14 of the PR Style Guide.

February 11 SkillFUL Workshop – Online Portfolios. APPLES update.

February 13 Speeches Review good/bad examples.

Assignment: complete speech started in class.

February 18 News Releases TBD

February 20 Feature pitches Discuss key elements of a successful pitch.

Assignment: draft a feature pitch.

February 25 AP exercise, APPLES updates, feature

Pitches. Pgs. 211-212 in the PR Guide

February 27 Midterm review Class discussion

March 3 Midterm Exam Open book, open notes, in-class exam

March 5 Broadcast Writing Writing for the Ear.

**Spring break begins on Friday, March 6 at 5 PM. Classes resume on Monday, March 16.**

March 17 Content Creation,

Corporate newsrooms In class discussion.

Assignment: read chapter 9 of the PR Style Guide.

March 19 Social Media Guest speaker.

March 24 Field Observation:

“Carolina Week” 3-5 p.m., TV studio, first floor Carroll Hall (date

subject to change).

March 26 Feature Pitches Updated APPLE feature pitch.

March 31 APPLES audits Review and discuss

April 2 Speech writing In-class exercise

April 7 Social Media Guest speaker: Leslie Minton

April 9 Speech writing Speech presentation

April 14 APPLES, Letters to the editor Review, in class assignment

April 16 APPLES APPLES Portfolio and Team Work Day

April 21 No class MEJO 332 Make up for studio visit

April 23 Last day for MEJO 332 Review for final exam

April 28 Final exam

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