**MEJO 332, Public Relations Writing – Spring 2021**

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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: Online via Zoom (to start)**  **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 and competently** **produce** any of the basic, professional, written materials required in the public relations profession;
* **integrate strategy and messaging** 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 one in class mid-term and one final exam. The final exam will be a take-home writing exercise that covers the full semester. Failure to complete the final will result in an AB.

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

Homework/in-class assignments 30%

APPLES 30%

Midterm 15%

Final 15%

Class participation 10%

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| 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!

**Out-of-class assignments (mostly for the 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 80 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!
* Everyone will have two required re-writes, regardless of grade. I will identify these and request them.

**Other:**

* There is a required 20-minute on-one-on meeting to discuss writing assignments. These will be scheduled starting in February.

**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. 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 that can be used for this purpose. If you have an issue with getting started, please let me know.

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 one-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**

5. **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.

6. **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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| - 2 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 20 Welcome! Introductions. Definition of public relations. What’s

expected. Review of syllabus. Textbooks: PR Style Guide, AP Style Book.

Discuss AP Style. What it is. Why it’s important

APPLES assignment. What it is, what’s required. Update on available nonprofits.

Press release writing. Uses and structure. Identifying the lead. Incorporating the message. Should you call on third party authorities through data or quotes?

Boilerplates and headings.

First press release: Topic: UNC-CH Spring Semester Begins Online. What information should this highlight? What’s the headline? What’s the lead? Who should be quoted?

Breakout rooms to discuss the strategy, leads, messaging.

Assignment: Read Chapter 11 in the Style Guide. Finish press release. Come to next class prepared to discuss.

January 25 Press releases. Q&As. Review and discuss UNC press release. Re-write

during class.

Discuss Q&As. Leveraging press release materials for use in additional content. How will these be used? How will they be viewed?

What Q&As should be included? What is the message? The key information? Who will be responding to the questions? Why?

Breakout room discussion. Reconvene.

Assignment: finish Q&A. Read Chapter 4 in Style Guide: Communications Audits..

January 27 Q&As. APPLES. Review and discuss Q&As.

APPLES. Onboarding a client. Role of audits.

What is an audit? What should it cover? How is it structured? How is it used? Assignment: begin audit of the client’s communications efforts. This is a team effort.

Breakout rooms to divide up the audit tasks.

Assignment: Come to class prepared to discuss strengths/weaknesses of your client’s communications strategies. This may include: messaging, press coverage, social media, website content, and other elements.

February 1 Discuss APPLES.

Social media. Client updates. Onboarding a client, part 2. What are

our goals? How do we measure success? Review current status.

Social media. How can it be used to expand visibility for the APPLES (or any) client? Linkedin, Twitter, and Instagram.

Assignment: create a Linkedin post, support with Twitter. Linkedin will highlight a service/function/ event/ issue for the APPLES client.

Breakout rooms to discuss and divide up individual assignments.

Assignment: complete social media posts.

February 3 Media lists. Discuss media lists. What are they? How

are they used? How should they be used in the context of APPLES (an extension of the audit process)?

Breakout groups. Develop media lists for APPLES clients.

Assignment: continue to research the media list.

February 8 Pitches Review speeches. Discuss pitches. What are they?

How are they used? How does news get made?

Begin pitch draft.

Breakout to discuss pitch.

Assignment: finish pitch.

Identify a survey-based news story. Analyze how it was generated and come to class prepared to discuss.

February 10 Pitches What are they? How are they used by public

relations people?

Begin draft pitch for APPLES client. Break out to work on in class.

Surveys. Brief in-class discussion.

Assignment: finish pitch. Find example of a news story driven by a survey.

February 15 Wellness Day. No class.

February 17 Surveys/Pitches Discuss pitches.

Discuss survey driven news. Develop our own survey

questions and data.

Brief APPLES update. Action plans. Audits.

Assignment: draft survey press release. Continue

APPLES work.

February 22 Surveys (2) Discuss survey releases.

APPLES status updates. Audits and action plans should be completed though both can be updated as you learn more about the client.

Read Chapter 12 in PR Style Guide: Op-Eds. Identify on an op-ed you think does a particularly good job of advancing and argument and come to class prepared to discuss.

February 24 Op-Eds Discuss the use of opinion pieces. What makes them

effective? When should they be used? What’s the optimum length? Begin work on an op-ed supporting/addressing an APPLES client issue.

Assignment: finish the op-ed.

Read Chapter 13 in the PR Style Guide: Public Service Announcements. Identify a PSA you think works. Why is it effective?

March 1 Review Op-Eds. Discuss.

Public Service Announcements Discuss use of public service announcements (PSAs).

Draft a PSA for your APPLES client. What information do we want to convey? What do we want the listeners/viewers to do?

Break out room to discuss ideas.

Assignment: finish public service announcement.

March 3 Midterm Midterm . Begin in class. Due March 8 before class.

Research speeches. Identify one you think is especially powerful / effective. Come to class prepared to discuss why.

March 8 Speeches/PSAs. Discuss PSAs.

Discuss speech writing. What makes

A speech effective?

Assignment: Draft a short speech (300-400 words). This can be the entire speech or the introduction to something longer. Draw the listener in. Read pages 211-212 in Style Guide.

March 10 Speeches. Discuss speeches.

New press release on APPLES client.

Breakout: Identify news priorities. Agree on topic. What’s the news? Who’s the audience? Draft release.

Assignment: draft the release.

March 15 Non-Profit Communications Guest Speaker: Susan Ross

Moss & Ross.

Assignment: continue APPLES work.

March 17 Press releases /

Corporate Newsroom (2) Create new corporate newsroom content for APPLES event or activity.

Assignment: complete in-class project. APPLES.

March 22 Bylined / contributed articles. What are they? How do they work?

Breakout to identify a topic and target media outlet for your APPLES client. Begin drafting.

Assignment: complete bylined article. Find a Letter

to the editor that you find compelling. Be prepared to discuss why. Read Chapter 9 of the PR Guide.

March 24 APPLES Update.

Letters to the Editor What they are. How they’re used. Review examples.

Breakout: identify publication for the APPLES client. Draft letter to the editor on relevant topic.

Assignment: complete letter. Read Chapter

March 29 Broadcast Writing Writing for the Ear. Begin work on a broadcast

script.

Assignment: complete broadcast script.

March 31 APPLES review. Class time to work on projects.

April 5 Wellness Day.

April 7 Talking points What are they? How are they used? Create

situation where we need to draft talking points. Draft.

Assignment: finish draft.

Find an effective use of Blogs and/or Linkedin. Come prepared to explain why it works.

April 12 Social Media – Blogs, Twitter,

Linkedin, Instagram (2) Discuss the role of social media. Should you be

controversial with it? Why or why not? Blogs, Linkedin, Twitter, Instagram.

Breakout groups to discuss social media, content strategy.

Assignment: Draft a short blog post for your APPLES client. read Chapter 7 in the Style Guide.

April 14 Fielder’s Choice Pick any project from the semester (press release,

speech, bylined article, Q&A, etc.). Draft a 300-400 word document based on your selection.

Assignment: finish draft.

April 19 APPLES In class work on APPLES.

April 21 AP Style Why is it important?

In-class exercise.

April 26 Reflection essay for APPLES. Discuss. Work on essay. What have you learned? Has

it been a valuable experience?

Assignment: continue APPLEs work.

Discuss summary memo for delivery to the client.

This will include a status update for projects and brief recommendations for the future.

Break out into teams and draft.

April 28 Reflection essay: writing for public relations. The purpose? The techniques? What makes for good public relations writing.

May 3 APPLES wrap up.

May 5 Last day of classes.

May 10 Exam emailed out at 10 AM ET.

May 12 APPLES portfolio due.

May 13 Final exam due at 5 PM ET.

EMAIL TO PROFESSOR.

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