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2020

PBRL 3421: Public Relations Writing (Syllabus)

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Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3421-001

Spring 2020

M/W 11:30-1:30, Meeman 202

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog Description

Emphasis on communication tactics; plan, write, and produce public relations tools; audience and media selection; print and electronic media.

Prerequisites

JRSM 2121, PBRL 3400

Textbooks

Newsom, D., & Haynes, J. (2017). *Public relations writing: Form and style* (11th ed.). Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

The Associated Press Stylebook 2017 (or 2016). New York: Basic Books.

Classroom format

This class will include lecture, discussion, in-class activities, and group assignments. Students will write and submit assignments to eCourseware, which will be returned with feedback meant to encourage student improvement over the course of the semester. Access to a computer or mobile electronic device (tablet or smartphone) with internet access is required to complete many (if not all) of your assignments. Please let me know if you need information on computers available for use on campus.

I see this learning environment as an empowered learning environment, I expect that you show up ready to engage with myself and your classmates. It's important to ask questions when you're lost, and pay attention so you don't get lost on purpose.

It is my hope that you know and believe that I am always willing to help you. Always ask for clarification(s) if you have any questions or doubts: the sooner the better. It's important to be proactive. If you're having an issue, let's work together to make sure you are doing what you can, when you can. Recognize that there's a difference between reasons and excuses. I'm always willing to work with you if you've got a good reason—see a few examples of good reasons below.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis home page: <http://www.memphis.edu>
2. Click on the “MyMemphis” link at the bottom of the left column menu.
3. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
4. Click on the “eCampus Resources” tab.
5. In the center column of the page, click on the blue UofM eCourseware link
6. Down on that page, in the SPRING 2020 course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3421 - 001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

Students with disabilities & accommodations

If you will need accommodations to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. Remember, this does not mean you are incapable or receiving special treatment. We all have specific tools we use to do our best work. I encourage you to consider which tools you need to be your best in this class.

Trauma & emotional needs

This class is just one component of your life. It is important, but sometimes we experience trauma and crisis, and we need to reprioritize. As your instructor, I feel your health and well-being is more important than this class. If completing this course or an assignment to the best of your abilities is challenging, please let me know as soon as possible. I am here for you and want to work with you.

Course expectation

As a writing-focused class, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients’ stories. While considering the big picture (what’s going on in our communities, nation, and world) and combining that with a commitment to targeting and understanding audiences, conducting solid primary and secondary research, and building strong relationships; we will use our strategic storytelling tools to develop news releases, infographics, media kits, and other strategic writing tools.

For this spring class, you will pick one local client of your choice (with approval from me—mostly to make sure there’s enough to write about) and this client will serve as the inspiration for every assignment (with exceptions to the certification, Twitter chat, portfolio, and résumé).

Client examples

Girls Inc., CHOICES, OUT Memphis, Muddy’s Bakery, Memphis Rox, Fox & CatVintage, Buff City Soaps, Novel books

Course work will be accomplished every week. Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time, which is Sunday at 11:59 p.m. CT unless otherwise noted.

As part of this class you will be required to earn your Hootsuite Platform Certification. The Hootsuite Platform Certification is industry-recognized and demonstrates your expertise with the social media management platform Hootsuite. Details about this process will be provided separately.

Other parts of your grade will come from writing and submitting assignments, and participating in online discussions and Twitter chats. These assignments must be submitted per instructions; no credit will be given outside of the proper submission guidelines.

You will need to get in the habit of checking eCourseware regularly. I use this platform to communicate with the class.

Additionally, you will be required to start/update your online portfolio to showcase your work and continue to build your professional online presence. Specific requirements and details will be provided separately.

Grading

A+ = 97-100%; A = 93-96%; A- = 90-92%

B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%

C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%

D+ = 67-69%; D = 60-66%

F 0-59%

Plagiarism policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, plus meet with Teri

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo

Third offense: Automatic class fail

Final assignment, regardless of which offense: Automatic 0 on assignment

Citation policy

For this class, we'll use AP Style (<https://www.apstylebook.com>) and APA style (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html).

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar and language. A large part of public relations is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

I expect your work to be good – and to be yours. What is not yours should be fully cited. In documenting sources, you must use APA formatting. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources. In addition, Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

Late work

<24 hours late: -10%

24-48 hours late: -20%

>48 hours: Feedback only

Emailed assignment policy

I will not accept assignments via email unless I *tell* you to email it to me.

Your deliverables

Writing Assignments	Points
Fact sheet	5 points
Résumé	5 points
Infographic (two parts)	10 points
Position paper (two parts)	10 points
Twitter chat plan (two parts)	10 points
News release	10 points
Media Kit (two parts)	10 points
Brochure	10 points
News conference speech	10 points
Hootsuite Certificate	5 points
Online portfolio (final)	5 points
Participation/engagement	10 points
Total	100 points

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, please understand that changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced as soon as possible. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. C.T. unless otherwise noted.

Week 1, January 20: Setting us up for success

Readings: No readings

M: No class

W: First day hijinks

Assignments: None

Week 2, January 27: PR Writing: Telling Stories

Readings: Chapters 1: PR and the Writer

M: Fact sheet (p. 160) + Understanding voice

W: Telling our organization's stories

Assignments: None

Week 3, February 3: Writing Principles

Readings: Chapter 3-4

M: Writing 101: Traditional writing

W: Writing 101: Semester strategies (one-on-one meetings with Teri to talk about the class)

Assignments: Fact sheet (2/9)

Week 4, February 10: Ethics

Readings: Chapter 2

M: Ethics and writing

W: Personal branding day

Assignments: Résumé (2/16)

Week 5, February 17: Research

Readings: Chapter 6: Research for the PR Writer

M: Secondary research + Infographics

W: Primary research

Assignments: Infographic research outline (2/23). Pass/fail assignment

Week 6, February 24: Persuasion

Readings: Chapter 7: Writing to Persuade

M: PSAs

W: White papers/position papers

Assignments: Infographic (3/1)

Week 7, March 2: Writing for traditional media (print and broadcast)

Readings: Chapter 9

M: News releases

W: News releases etc.

Assignments: Position paper outline (3/8). Pass/fail assignment

Week 8, March 9: Spring break

Enjoy this midterm break instead of a midterm exam!

Readings: No readings

Assignments: Optional first look at portfolio. This is not graded (3/15)

Week 9, March 16: Writing for journalists

Readings: Chapter 8

M: Pitches, Backgrounders, Fact Sheets

W: Media kits

Assignments: News release (3/22)

Week 10, March 23: Writing for internal publics

Readings: Chapter 10

M: Understanding internal publics and communication tools

W: Work day and/or meeting day

Assignments: Hootsuite Certification (3/29). Pass/fail assignment

Week 11, March 30: Blogs and newsletters

Readings: Chapter 11

M: Blogger relations

W: Newsletters and Twitter chats

Assignments: Media kit: Part 1 (4/5)

Week 12, April 6: Social media

Readings: Chapter 5

M: Writing for social media

W: Twitter chat (we will meet virtually on Twitter)

Assignments: Twitter chat outline for your organization

Week 13, April 13: Writing + design

Readings: Chapter 12

M: Magazines/Feature releases

W: Brochures

Assignments: Final position paper (4/19)

Week 14, April 20: Writing for Voice

Readings: Chapter 13

M: Speeches and news conferences

W: Work day and/or meeting day

Assignments: Brochure (4/26)

Week 15, April 27: Writing and crisis communication

Readings: Chapter 14

M: Crisis

W: News conference speeches

Assignments: News conference speech transcript (4/29 during class)

Finals week: May 1-7

Readings: No assigned readings

Assignment: Media kit (5/4 at 12:30 p.m.). This assignment is exempt from the late policy.

Final portfolio (5/4 at 11:59 p.m.). This assignment is exempt from the late policy.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Five Pillars in PBRL 3421

- *Critical Thinking:* Students must demonstrate an understanding of writing for a specific public, writing from a specific point of view for an organization and how to choose the best media channel to communicate their message to a target audience.
- *Media Literacy:* Students learn how to engage with both traditional and social media; how relationships and communities are built within these channels; and how to choose the appropriate media channels based on their desired target audience.
- *Multimedia:* Students look at the use of social media in public relations, including the potential for community engagement and management, the importance of consistent organizational voice across multiple platforms and how to translate one message into a variety of social media platforms. Students also add collateral pieces to their online portfolios.
- *Professionalism:* Students learn the professional and ethical standards of the public relations industry by discussing ethics statements from a variety of professional organizations, working through simulated ethical scenarios from a variety of perspectives and learning how and why legal ramifications may exist within the field. Students continue work on their personal portfolio sites as a way of establishing their personal professional brand.
- *Writing:* Students focus on writing for a variety of public relations formats, including press

releases, position or white papers, fact sheets, press conference statements, brochures and newsletters, various social media platforms, and feature releases. Students edit and critique not only their work but also the work of their peers.

Professional values and competencies for PBRL 3421

- 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 gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communication.
- 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.
- 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 current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)

- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products and appropriate channels to reach the target audience.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.
- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- Understand the differences between writing for various mediums.
- Evaluate their own and other's public relations writing for accuracy, clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style, as well as suitability for specified medium.
- Understand how to use appropriate software and hardware to create public relations products, as well as how to effectively utilize social media channels to communicate with the target audience.

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and exams.
- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can

be used to communicate and engage with them.

- Identify appropriate images/graphics to accompany public relations products based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Identify common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write a press release, position or white paper, fact sheet, press conference statement, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written public relations materials.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.
- Learn about the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Learn about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Learn about the different public relations products, which tools are used to create them, and what media each is best suited for.

Understanding

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.
- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Recognize potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Understand which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

Application

- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Write a press release, position or white paper, fact sheet, press conference statement, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or SquareSpace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files and writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary).

Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a “job” in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (“C-”) in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student’s online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

Academic integrity

In addition to University-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media class, students are expected to comply with copyright law and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

Online SETEs

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Diversity and inclusivity

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Media reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

Weather policy

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the University is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.

Student support

Students who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.