OVERVIEW / COURSE OBJECTIVES
Ask anyone working in public relations or strategic communication: good writing skills are important—really important.
In this class, you’ll
- work to improve your writing and editing skills
- learn about a range of common public relations / strategic comm formats including
  - backgrounders, bios, boilerplates
  - traditional and social media versions of news releases, pitch letters, and other media relations tools
  - op eds, advocacy messages, infographic
  - media contact list using CISIONPOINT
- become more comfortable with one of the challenges of writing in a professional setting—responding to criticism and shaping your text and format to meet the expectations of others

TEXTS AND MATERIALS
Readings posted on ICON
A dictionary and a usage guide such as Working with Words or When Words Collide for reference
A pocket folder to save graded assignments (to be revised for final portfolio)

ASSIGNMENTS / EVALUATION
Graded writing assignments 60%
- Writing about an organization (15%)
  Basic information pieces for an organization of your choice (bio, backgrounder, etc).
- Communicating with and through media I and II (20%/10%)
  Basic news releases, pitch letters, some on a deadline, media talking points, media contact lists, email
- Writing to persuade / advocacy (15%)
  Message plan, op ed / letter to editor, infographic

Client-based strategic communication project / individual and group / TBD 20%
Components to be determined after consultation with client

Final portfolio eval 15%
You will revise some of the major writing assignments you did during the semester. Your grade will reflect your editing/revising efforts as well as the quality of your work. I will also take into account your “professionalism”—my evaluation of your work habits and attitude. “A” level professionals are ready with any materials or drafts assigned. They actively participate in class every day. They pay attention to details. They are not satisfied with first or second drafts; they ask for and cheerfully respond to suggestions for revision.

SJMC tweets 5% Our class will be responsible for helping the School of Journalism and Mass Communication maintain an active Twitter presence by providing “tweetable” information and news for distribution on the School’s account.
Grading Guidelines
You will receive a letter grade for each major assignment. Final grades will be computed using the scale below. (A+ grade not used.)

93-100 = A
90-92 = A-
87-89 = B+
83-86 = B
80-82 = B-
77-79 = C+
73-76 = C
70-72 = C-
67-69 = D+
63-66 = D
60-62 = D-
Below 60 = F

The Iowa Dozen
We will focus on these elements:
  o write correctly and clearly
  o conduct research and gather information responsibly
  o edit and evaluate carefully
  o demonstrate creativity and independence
  o explore media institutions and practices

Expectations / Class Structure
Typical class: we talk about a particular writing task, then you practice. In most cases, your in-class practice work will not be graded. Its purpose is to help you learn the formats you will use in your graded major assignments or to explore some other types of public relations communication—I’ll review your work and talk with you about it rather than grade it. It is, however, an important part of the class.

Please make good use of the resources we have—three and a half hours a week in a well-equipped writing lab. My time and attention is another resource—keep me busy. I want to help you improve your writing, but you are responsible for showing me your work in progress, asking questions, and making a serious commitment to editing and revision.

I expect you to be here on time. Arriving late or leaving early may occasionally be unavoidable, but please don’t make it a habit. If you have on-going conflict with this class, please resolve it or drop the class.

This will be an informal and, I hope, friendly and enjoyable class. Please respect your classmates, me, and the J-School by following these guidelines:
  o no food or drink (except water)
  o no cell phones (that means turned off, put away, no checking messages or texting)
  o no ipods
  o no e-mail, web surfing, Facebook, work for another class, etc. during our class time
  o no or limited use of laptops or tablets—when you are looking at a screen, you are not connecting with me or your classmates

Please note that this class assumes competence in grammar and language usage. I will help you as much as I can, but if you need to do some catch up work, I’ll refer you to the Writing Center.
CLASS POLICIES / ATTENDANCE, ASSIGNMENTS

I will keep a record of your attendance and expect you to be here every day. When you miss class, you miss the work we do on those days. I understand that some time during the term you may be sick or have an important obligation that keeps you from class. Let me know in advance when you can, but please note that all absences factor into your final grade as outlined below. My job is to evaluate your work in class, not to evaluate your reasons for missing it. However, if you find that a serious health or other problem is affecting your work and attendance, please talk with me—sooner rather than later—about how to handle course obligations. Also talk with me if a class meeting or assignment interferes with a religious observance.

Missing

- 6 classes will lower your final grade by 1/3 letter (ex: B+ to B)
- 7-8 classes, by 2/3 grade (ex: B+ to B-)
- 9-10 classes by a full grade (ex: B+ to C+)
- 11+ classes is grounds for failure.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date or as specified. Come to class with a completed assignment—not an unprinted computer document. Please staple assignments. Always keep a copy of your assignments. We all do our best, but papers or electronically submitted material can go astray; you are responsible for providing a copy if necessary.

Late work is not accepted except in cases of illness or other emergencies. If you miss class, you are still responsible for any schedule changes announced; be in touch with a classmate to find out what went on in your absence.

Representing the work of someone else as your own or getting credit in two classes for the same work is academic dishonesty. While I encourage you to discuss assignments with others, I expect that anything you hand in is your own. I expect that each person in a group has contributed equally and can provide a full description of his or her effort. Work for this class must be original—not revised versions of research or writing you have done or are doing for another class. Please talk with me if you have questions or want to discuss specific situations.

UNIVERSITY/CLAS POLICIES

Administrative Home The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Academic Honesty All CLAS students have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies The final examination schedule for each class is announced around the fifth week of the semester by the Registrar. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the dates and times of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.
TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE*

Week of
21 / 23 Jan  Getting started / agency writing test
28 / 30 Jan  Overview of PR writing/editing
4 / 6 Feb    Writing basic organization materials
11 / 12 Feb  continued (organization materials due)*
18 / 20 Feb  Communicating with and through media I/news releases, pitch letters
25 / 27 Feb  continued
4 / 6 Mar    continued (in-class graded media writing)*
11 / 13 Mar  Communicating with and through media II/media contact lists, soc media news rel, pitching by email
(18 / 20 Mar) SPRING BREAK
25 / 27 Mar  continued
1 / 3 Apr    Advocacy writing / writing to persuade
8 / 10 Apr   continued (advocacy pieces due)*
15 / 17 Apr  Project work
22 / 24 Apr  continued
29 Apr / 1 May continued
6 / 8 May    Project work continued / Final portfolio work

*Detailed schedules (approx monthly) will provide more information and may revise due dates or order of topics.