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
  - backgrounder, 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
  - strategic communication campaign (audience research and creative)
- 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.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Typical class: we talk about a particular writing task or strategic comm challenge, then you try it or explore further. In most cases, your in-class work will not be graded. Its purpose is to help you learn the formats you will use in your graded major assignments, to think through of the decisions that strategic communication pros must—I’ll review your work and talk with you about it rather than grade it. It is, however, an important part of the class. Sometimes you will work on your own, sometimes in small groups. 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.

THE IOWA DOZEN

We will focus on these elements:

- write correctly and clearly
- conduct research and gather information responsibly
- edit and evaluate carefully
- demonstrate creativity and independence
- explore media institutions and practices

ASSIGNMENTS / EVALUATION

Graded writing assignments 350 pts

- Writing about an organization (100)
  Basic information pieces for an organization of your choice (bio, backgrounder, etc).
- Media relations basics (100)
  News releases, pitch letters on a deadline.
- Researching media (75)
  Media contact list and pitch story
- Writing to persuade / advocacy / issues (75)
  Message plan, opinion piece, visual/social information sharing

Client-based strategic communication project / individual and group / TBD 50 pts

Class participation and preparation 50 pts

- Being ready with drafts, practice writing, participating in group activities (points awarded most class sessions)

Final portfolio 100 pts

- Revisions of some assignments + a few new pieces.
Grading Guidelines / 550 pts total (A+ not used)

511 = A
495 = A-
478 = B+
456 = B
440 = B-
423 = C+
401 = C

385 = C-
368 = D+
346 = D
330 = D-
<330 = F

Texts and Materials
Readings posted on ICON
A dictionary and a usage guide such as Working with Words or When Words Collide for reference

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

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:

- no food or drink (except water)
- no cell phones (that means turned off, put away, no checking messages or texting)
- no ipods
- no e-mail, web surfing, Facebook, work for another class, etc. during our class time
- 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.

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.
Week of

25/27 August  Getting started / agency writing test
1/3 September  Considering PR/strat comm writing
8/10 September  Writing basic organization materials
15/17 September  continued (organization materials due)*
22/24 September  Media basics / news releases, pitch letters
29 Sept / 1 Oct  continued
6/8 October  continued (in-class graded news release, pitch)*
13/15 October  Researching media / email pitches
20/22 October  continued (media contact list due)*
27/29 October  Advocacy / writing to persuade
3/5 November  continued (advocacy materials due)*
10/12 November  Strategic comm project / audience and creative
17/19 November  continued
24/26 November  Thanksgiving break
1/2 December  continued
8/10 December  Final portfolio due

*Schedules, due dates may change