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
  - 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.

SJMC LEARNING OUTCOMES

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is committed to your academic and professional success. In line with this commitment, we have identified particular learning outcomes that every student should obtain by the time they earn a JMC degree. You can find more information about these learning outcomes here http://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/undergraduate-programs/assessment. This course contributes to the following areas:

- Understand that clear, concise, correct writing is at the heart of journalistic expression and that reporting and communicating it effectively requires a knowledge and achievement of the highest, professionally-accepted standards in all work. You'll do a lot of writing.

- To demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups (including communities defined by gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion and sexual orientation) in a global society in relationship to communications. You'll think about how to communicate effectively and with respect for your audiences.

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press in real space and cyberspace, and demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and their historical development. You'll explore how strategic communication differs from journalism.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Typical class: we talk about a particular writing format or strategic comm task, 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 some of the decisions that strategic communication pros face—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. In addition to the scheduled topics and assignments, we'll likely do some "specials"—mini sessions on grammar or a writing challenge or issue.

TEXTS AND MATERIALS

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

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
- 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 25 pts
- Being ready with drafts and class prep assignments, present for in-class activities. (I'll record points at mid and end of semester.)

Final portfolio 100 pts
- Revisions of some assignments + a few new pieces.

EVALUATION

Work will be graded holistically using the criteria for content, structure, format, and writing style outlined in each assignment. Piece must reflect understanding of the strategic communication purpose. Care with grammar, usage, and mechanics is a basic requirement for all work. Points will be assigned as follows:

- A range work (90%+ of possible points) meets or exceeds expectations in all areas.
- B range work (80%+ of possible points) meets expectations in most areas.
- C range work (70%+ of possible points) meets expectations in some areas.
- D range work (60%+ of possible points) barely meets expectations in a few areas, does not in most.
- F range work (50%+ of possible points) attempts assignment but does not meet basic expectations.
- 0 points for assignments not submitted.

COURSE GRADE / 525 PTS TOTAL (A+ not used)

488 = A
473 = A-
457 = B+
436 = B
420 = B-
404 = C+
383 = C
368 = C-
352 = D+
331 = D
315 = D-
<315 = F

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 a health or other problem is affecting your work and attendance, talk with me right away. Also talk with me if a class meeting or assignment interferes with a religious observance.

Missing
- 4 classes will lower your final grade by 1/3 letter (ex: B+ to B)
- 5 classes, by 2/3 grade (ex: B+ to B-)
- 6 classes by a full grade (ex: B+ to C+)
- 7+ 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 e-mail, web surfing, Facebook, work for another class, etc. during our class time
- screens closed when we are talking—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.

**SCHEDULE OVERVIEW / DETAILED SCHEDULE POSTED ON ICON**

**Week of**

Aug 23/25 Getting started / agency writing test
Sept 6/8 Considering PR/strat comm writing
Sept 13/15 Writing basic organization materials
Sept 20/22 continued (organization materials due)*
Sept 27/29 Media basics / news releases, pitch letters
Oct 4/6 continued
Oct 11/13 continued (in-class graded news release, pitch)*
Oct 18/20 Researching media / email pitches
Oct 25/27 continued (media contact list due)*
Nov 1/3 Advocacy / writing to persuade
Nov 8/10 continued (advocacy materials due)*
Nov 15/17 Strategic comm project / audience and creative

Thanksgiving break
Nov 29 / Dec 1 continued
Dec 6 / 8 continued
Dec 13/15 Final portfolio due

*Schedules, due dates may change