Overview / course objectives
This class builds professional skills and knowledge necessary for jobs in public relations/strategic communication. You will
- work to improve writing and editing skills
- learn about a range of common public relations / strategic comm formats and tasks including
  - backgrounders, bios, boilerplates
  - traditional and social media versions of news releases, pitch letters, and other media relations tools
  - media research using CISION
  - opinion/advocacy
  - creative concepts and tactics for social marketing
- think strategically about messages and tactics
- 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. Practice assignments will help you prepare for graded work or will explore additional formats or contexts. Sometimes you will work on your own, sometimes in small groups. Please make good use of the resources we have—2.5 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. We will also take class time to review some grammar or other writing challenges. Prepare for class by doing assigned reading—it’s not a lot, but it’s important.

Texts and materials
Readings posted on ICON
Usage and style guides that you find helpful (Depending on context, that might be a general language/writing guide such as Working with Words or When Words Collide, an organizational guide, such as the University of Iowa’s style sheet, or a professional bible, such as the AP or Yahoo guides.)
EVALUATION

Graded writing assignments 450 pts
A variety of basic strat comm formats; some completed on deadline in class. Work will be graded using the criteria for purpose, content, structure, format, and writing style outlined in each assignment. Correct grammar, usage, and mechanics are basic requirements for all work. Writing assignments will receive letter grades that translate to points (For example, for a 100 pt assignment, A = 94+, A- = 91, B+= 88, B= 85, B-= 81, C+= 78, C = 75, C- = 71 . . .)

News release I (50)
News release II (100)
Media research and pitch letter (100)
Basic info pieces for small org of your choice (100)
Content marketing (50)
Opinion (50)

Creative concepts/tactics/social marketing 50 pts
Group project developing creative concepts for a client

Professional practice 150 pts (50, 100)
Twice during the semester you will demonstrate knowledge and abilities expected in entry-level professional positions; the second assignment at the end of the semester is similar to screening tests given in job/internship interviews.

Grammar/editing quizzes 25 pts
Occasional checks on editing, proofreading, grammar. Will be announced in advance.

In-class activities, course prep 25 pts
You will do work every day: practice assignments, exploring other formats and tactics, grammar/editing review. I’ll occasionally ask you bring examples or prepare for class with a short analysis or writing assignment. Points recorded at mid and end of semester. In class activities and practice cannot be made up.

700 PTS TOTAL

COURSE GRADE (A+ not used)
Note that the final grade % is based on many assignments—final % will not be rounded up.

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CLASS POLICIES / ATTENDANCE, ASSIGNMENTS, EXPECTATIONS

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—so no category of “excused” absences.) You are responsible for making good decisions.

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.

If an on-going serious health or other situation 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.
Assignments must be submitted in the manner and at the time indicated in assignment instructions. Assignments that are late will lose one letter grade per day, beginning at the start of class and including weekends and holidays. This means that a paper which would have received an A if it was on time will receive a B the next day, C for two days late, and so on. If you miss an assignment deadline or an in-class graded assignment because of an illness or emergency, be in touch right away.

You are responsible for any schedule or assignment changes announced. If you miss class, check ICON and be in touch with a classmate to find out what went on in your absence.

This will be an informal and, I hope, friendly and enjoyable class. Lab/writing courses require you to be an active and attentive participant, and I expect that you will observe the following standards of professional behavior:

- Arrive on time, don’t leave early.
- Keep your attention on the work of the class during the time we have together.
- Put laptops away, lab computers open to course materials only during the class period.
- Stash your phone in your bag—really (talk with me if an urgent situation requires you to use your phone)
- Keep ears open, no ear buds.
- Don’t eat—unless you are sharing with the class.

If I note problems in these areas, we will discuss the necessary changes and the consequences if not resolved, which might be extra work, grade penalty, or, in extreme situations, failure.

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.

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**

- **Jan 16** Getting started / Purposes/practices of strat comm writing
- **Jan 23** continued / professional practice I*
- **Jan 30** Media relations: news releases
- **Feb 6** continued / news release I*
- **Feb 13** continued
- **Feb 20** news release II* / Researching media
- **Feb 27** Pitching stories
- **Mar 6** continued / media research and pitch letter*
  S P R I N G  B R E A K
- **Mar 20** Writing about organizations
- **Mar 27** continued / org pieces*
- **Apr 3** Advocacy/opinion / letter to ed*
- **Apr 10** Content marketing / content piece*
- **Apr 17** Social marketing/creative concepts
- **Apr 24** creative concepts continued
- **May 1** present to client*

Final exam week / professional practice II*

* any schedule changes will be posted on ICON and announced in class