About the Instructor

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Academic Course Home

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences—School of Journalism and Mass Communication
http://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/
Department Chair: David Ryfe
E-mail: david-ryfe@uiowa.edu
Phone: 319-384-3383

Course Goal and Objectives

This workshop course will stress the communication fundamentals of clarity, concision, and cohesion. You will learn to target your readers, sharpen your message, and structure your writing for maximum impact. While refreshing your knowledge of mechanics (grammar, punctuation), you will progress through a series of more ambitious assignments that you will be able to apply to various communication platforms in various public relations-related professions. You will also hone your editing skills.

Media/System Requirements

This class will meet virtually using Zoom, a virtual conferencing software. Additional information is posted on the Canvas homepage.

Listed below are the media/system requirements applicable to this course:

- **System requirements.** Computer with high-speed Internet access (wired preferred), USB headset w/microphone and webcam.
- A thumb drive or cloud folder to store coursework on.
- Need Technical Support? Contact the Division of Continuing Education technical support staff at dce-techsupport@uiowa.edu.

Required Textbook/Media

The following two required books have been ordered through IOWA BOOK, 8 S. Clinton St, Iowa City, IA 52240 • (319) 337-4188. They are also available on-line:


Course Structure

In our weekly workshop meetings, we will review basic principles of grammar, while learning to write mission statements, fliers, fact sheets, biographical sketches, news releases, media pitches, speeches, multimedia presentations, public service announcements, letters to the editor, and op-eds. To practice these skills in a real-
world context, the final writing exercise will be based on a professional agency entrance test.

Course Policies

- Attendance is essential, because all work will be completed during our scheduled class time.
- No make-up assignments except in documented or pre-arranged cases.
- Reading responses are due in the appropriate Canvas Dropbox folder before class. These one-page, double-spaced, bulleted summaries of the assigned readings should conclude with two questions you want answered in class. They will be graded on a pass-fail basis.
- **Missed classes or late work.** In-class exercises and quizzes cannot be made up. Extensions for longer work are possible only under genuinely extenuating circumstances, which must be documented. In the event of an extension, late assignments will be marked down by one letter grade per day below the assigned grade. None will be accepted late unless you have notified the instructor in advance with an explanation. Except for truly extraordinary circumstances, no assignments will be accepted at all more than one week after the original due date.

Course Work

- **Writing Assignments**
  Because this is a workshop, our writing assignments will be completed in class. The eight graded assignments are labeled (below.) We will complete other exercises for practice and review.

- **Reading Responses (weekly):**
  These one-page, bulleted summaries of the assigned readings will be due before class in the ICON dropbox I have set up for each of the reading responses that are marked in the syllabus. Beneath your summaries each time, please write two questions you would like to discuss during class.

- **Final exercise: Agency writing**
  Most professional strategic communication agencies administer a multi-part writing exercise to job applicants. In our last class meeting, you will write a news release announcing your appointment to a new PR position and a 200-word essay about how you plan to use the writing skills you have developed in your professional work.
Grading Criteria

Final course grades will be assessed based on the student's performance in the following items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of final grade</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Graded writing assignments (10 @ 5 points each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Reading responses (10 @2 points each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Attendance/participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Final exercise: Agency writing exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 100%</td>
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</table>

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>76-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>73-75%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-85%</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-82%</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>65-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>60-64%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-75%</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>&gt;60%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Email:

Email is the official method of communication for this course. Students can expect to receive weekly communications from the instructor (via email) introducing assigned course-work. Students are expected to check their university email account frequently.

The course structure described above assumes that students have basic computer skills and are knowledgeable about the various programs and hardware they will need to use during this session (e.g. Microsoft Word). For information and computer support geared toward distance education students, access:

- the Technical Support page - http://distance.uiowa.edu/article/technical-support
- the Student Guide to ICON - https://icon.uiowa.edu/help/students/
Course Calendar

Each week:

- **Join** virtual class meeting
- **Upload** reading response before and completed in-class assignment at the end of class to ICON Dropboxes

Aug. 25 — First day of class

Note: I will be traveling during class time today. So, for this class meeting, see the pre-recorded ZOOM video that I have prepared to give you an overview of the course and syllabus. We will meet next week via Zoom to start the semester's work.

- Course overview to explain
  - Syllabus and course readings
  - Exercises and course Web site
  - Reading responses

Sept. 1 — **Reading response 1 (Handbook and Tucker, one-pp. each)**

- Introductions: Names, goals and highlights.
- Grammar exercise
- In-class discussion: Exercises on p. 60.
Sept. 8 — Drafting short-form persuasion documents: Fact sheets and bio sketches

Part One

Exercise: Fact Sheets

- **Reading response 2**: Handbook, pp. 75-81. (Write this as a separate reading response.)

Part Two

- Exercise: Formatting the fact sheet (draft a one-page fact sheet for your professional bio-sketch.)
  - Bio Sketches—
    - Handbook, pp. 75-79.
    - **Graded exercise 1**: Write a 200-word bio sketch.

Sept. 15

Part One  Leads and News Releases

- Grammar exercise
- Leads:
  - The inverted pyramid revisited: organizing your story
  - Writing a list
  - The semantic map
  - Writing the summary lead

Part Two—News Releases (cont.)

Appointment release—**(Graded exercise 2)**: Revising your bio sketch as an appointment release
Sept. 22 — News Releases (cont.)

- Grammar exercise
- Exercise: Product release

Sept. 29—News Releases (cont.)

Part One

- Grammar exercise
- Exercise: Localizing a national release (Handbook, pp. 26-28)

Part Two—Releases (cont.)


Oct. 6—Note: I will be on a plane and unable to meet the class during the scheduled class time. Please see the ZOOM video I have prepared for instructions for your weekly assignment, which will be due by midnight Sunday.

- Out of class assignment: Analysis of <prnewswire.com>. Visit the Web site to answer the following questions:
  - On the home page what are the top “stories?”
  - See the “News by Sector and Topic” tab.
  - What kinds of releases are displayed there? What kinds of releases are shown under “Most Viewed?”
  - Identify one release as an example to describe.
    - Is the lead a “summary” lead?
    - Or is it delayed in a feature style?
    - How are links used in the text?
    - How long is the release? (Copy and paste the text into a Word file for the word count.)
    - Where in the release is there an “About Us” section?
  - What catches your attention most about the resources offered by this professional Web site?

Submit your 2-pp. (+/-) summary to the discussion dropbox on the course Web site. We will discuss your write-up in class next week.
Oct. 13—Discussion of PRNewswire.com exercise

Exercises

Part One: Assessing media relations: PR Newswire discussion exercise (in syllabus)

Part Two: Clip Search Exercise: Identifying reporters, sources and frames (in syllabus)

Oct. 20—Writing the pitch

- Grammar exercise
- Graded exercise 4: Writing a persuasive pitch

Oct. 27—Writing and Presenting Speeches (Graded exercise 5)

- Grammar exercise

Nov. 3—Writing and formatting the Powerpoint presentation (Graded exercise 6)

- Grammar exercise

Nov. 10—Writing the cover letter

- You will need a resume’ for this in-class exercise.

Nov. 17—Writing for broadcast: Public Service Announcements (Graded exercise 8)

- Grammar exercise
Nov. 24 — Thanksgiving break

Dec. 1 — Writing for the Internet
   o Grammar exercise
   o “On-line Writing and Communications.” See Icon for pdf.

Dec. 8 — Responsive Writing — The letter to the editor (100 words) **graded exercise 8**.
   o Grammar exercise

Final exam period (TBA) — Agency exercise and final essay due.
Exercise: PRNewswire analysis

As you read and review the articles that you find on-line, write out the answers to these questions. We will refer to them in our classroom discussion and turn them in afterwards.

The goal of this exercise will be to compare an original news release to resulting coverage on-line. First search the PRNewswire.com “feature news” category for originating releases. Then search the Web for related media coverage for comparison.

Instructions

You will write a report on your findings following these steps:

- Using PRNewswire.com, identify a current news release from the “feature news” tab.
- Search keywords from that release in Google to locate related coverage.
- List the first five Web sites’ names and URLs.

For each answer the following questions:

1. Who sponsored each site?
2. Are any of your top hits news sites? If so, which are they?
3. Is there evidence of the originating release on the site?
4. How accurate was the search? (Was there another, competing meaning for the keyword search?)
5. How much control over the release’s meaning did the originating company have? Give positive and negative examples.
6. How close to the top hit was the company’s site?
7. Which media were used on-line? (Audio, video, text, hyperlinks in the text?)
8. How was the top site connected to other, relevant sites?
Exercise—Clip Search: Identifying reporters, sources and frames

Knowing the news is an essential part of media relations and of strategic communications, in general. Being familiar with the issues, the reporters, and their sources can be central to your understanding of internal and external issue positions. In an earlier era, you would have used a “clipping service” to collect news articles on relevant subjects. This exercise demonstrates a quick approach to using databases to identify the recent coverage of a key issue.

The scenario: You are newly hired in the recently re-formed Office of the VP of Strategic Communications at the university. You have a key staff meeting tomorrow about the on-going scandal in UI Women’s Athletics and you need to get up to speed in order to participate knowledgeably.

There are two parts to this search: First, you will search the Access World News Research Collection for previous news stories and second you will search Twitter for more recent coverage.

Instructions:

Part One: Access World News Research Collection search:

• From uiowa.edu, go to “Libraries” link at bottom, right corner of UI homepage.
• Click on “Databases by subject” under “Articles” (on left)
• Select “Journalism” under “I-K.”
• Select “Access World News Research Collection” (middle of screen under “Selected Library Resources”)
• Log in with your Hawk Id and password
• See the blue world map:
  o select North America
  o select Iowa
  o Click on “Select multiple publications.” Select the Gazette and the Daily Iowan. Click on “include” publications.
    ▪ See the description of the newspaper (circulation, ownership, etc.)
• SEARCH Keywords: Search “Title IX” and “University of Iowa”
• See: Hits based on search and the yellow sidebar listing “related articles.”
• **ANALYSIS:** Skim the top three hits from your search to answer the following questions (one story at a time). Fill in the form (below.) Remember to copy-and-paste, rather than re-keying info.

  o **Points to address:**
    - Publication info. (title, date, reporter)
    - What is the lede?
    - Who are the main sources (from top to bottom), their affiliations, and main points. (Internal? External?)
    - Background info.:
      - Def. of Title IX?
      - Timeline of events (initial incidents, firing, lawsuit, etc.)
      - Other points to know:
        - Who is investigating the UI?
        - Why is this national story? (How do you know?)
        - How many complaints have been filed?
          Descriptions?
        - How many lawsuits have been filed?
        - Sexual assault reporting and Title IX implications for federal funding?
        - Other news?

**Part Two: Twitter search**

  - Go to “Twitter search” or directly to Twitter.com
  - Search the names of the Gazette or DI reporters whose names you have found in your database search. (*Gazette:* Vanessa Williams, Erin Jordan, Scott Dochterman; *DI:* Ryan Foley.)
  - What is the time-frame of this coverage?
  - Do the links take you to other outlets’ news?
  - Open the most recent news link to read it.
• What is the difference between the news database and Twitter for researching stories on the issue?
• Which one would keep you current on an issue?
• Why might Google not be adequate for this task?
Exercise—Clickbait analysis

Listen to:
  o http://www.onthemedia.org/tags/upworthy/
  o 8:15 minutes

Visit:
  o http://www.upworthy.com

Then identify examples of “click-bait” on these sites:
  o nytimes.com
  o nola.com
  o huffingtonpost.com
  o press-citizen.com

Answer these questions for in-class discussion:
  ▪ How does click-bait work to target intended readers?
  ▪ as persuasion?
  ▪ What is the emotional element versus the cognitive effect in stage one of the behavioral framework? Give examples.
  ▪ How likely is click-bait to reflect a strategic approach to communication with targeted publics?
  ▪ How would you know? Or could you know?
## Grading Rubric — Public relations writing

### I. Structure and Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral framework applied correctly</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format (based on example)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100

### II. Errors to avoid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points (per error)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax or word choice</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact error</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlimited
Policies & Resources

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 with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Academic Honesty
All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS 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 by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. 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 date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

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.