

Intro to Strategic Writing

PBRL 3421-M50

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Online/UofM Global

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Bridges information-based reporting with strategic writing. Students will learn how to use research, ethics, and critical thinking to develop their storytelling to fit the goals and objectives of each writing tool (e.g., media pitch, fact sheet, news release) while considering their client's needs and intended publics.

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

The Public Relations Writer's Handbook. Lehmann, W. (2020). New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-8153-6528-0 eBook ISBN: 978-1-3512-6192-0

*Available in hard copy or eBook. eBook is available for rent via Amazon for approximately \$25

The Associated Press Stylebook 2019 (or 2018). New York: Basic Books ISBN: 978-0-917360-68-8

*You can also access *The AP Stylebook* as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at apstylebook.com

Other readings will be assigned and posted to Canvas.

Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, we have no scheduled meeting time. **This can be convenient for you, but it also means that it is essential for you to be organized and motivated.**

This class will be presented through lectures, discussions, multimedia, and group activities utilizing online platforms including Canvas, podcasts, and social media sites. Regular participation in class is expected and will affect your grade. Part of academic success at the collegiate level is being able to add to discussions with informed ideas and thoughts, as well as being willing to ask questions if you are unsure about anything.

Class discussions taking place should remain respectful & professional, showing respect to all people regardless of background, sex, race, or any other factor. Remember: Public relations is all about creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships and our virtual classroom should

be no different.

This class is meant to build and improve your public relations writing skills as well as build your skills in writing in AP format. In class, you will write a variety of public relations pieces and begin developing a portfolio of relevant documents and creative pieces. There will be an emphasis on media relations, social media, and content creation.

Students will upload all required assignments to Canvas, and feedback will be given to encourage student improvement. **Access to a computer or an electronic device will be required.** Please be sure to read the instructions for each assignment carefully, as requirements for each assignment will vary.

Assignments being turned in will all need to be submitted as a .doc, .pdf or .pptx file unless otherwise noted. All assignments & quizzes will be due Sunday nights at 11:59 p.m. central time unless otherwise noted.

The best and quickest way to contact me is via my university email (kdowning@memphis.edu). I will typically respond to email with 24 – 48 hours. If the email is sent over the weekend or on a school break, the response time may be delayed. To allow time for response and clarification, please reach out with any assignment questions at least 48 hours prior to the deadline. **If you are having issues with an assignment or submitting, do not let issues snowball. Reach out to me early so that we may work out a solution.**

To succeed in this course, it is imperative to stay engaged and current with all required coursework. If at any point you are concerned about your grade or struggling to grasp course concepts, I encourage you to make an appointment with me for office hours so we can work to find a good solution. Remember that for me to help you, communication is key. Also remember that much more can be done if you reach out early in the semester - if you wait until the middle of April, there likely is not much we can do to turn things around.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:
<https://memphis.instructure.com/>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3421-M50 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

Course Requirements

Assignments. Course work will be completed every week. Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time. Double check each due time to ensure that you post by the deadline.

LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a frequently used tool for professionals looking for PR jobs and hiring PR pros. As rising PR professionals, you should have a digital profile to showcase your skills and your experience. As part of our focus on your professional brand development, we will be looking at your LinkedIn profiles. If you don't have one yet, don't worry, we'll be setting it up.

Discussion forum. Despite being an online course, students are expected to have active class participation. Participation will be evaluated by your response and activity in Canvas discussion forums. Each week will include one or more discussions about topics covered in the readings or the PR industry in general. Discussion may take the form of written, audio or video requirements. If written, your responses should be well articulated and substantial. Clearly indicate your main idea or point of view and support it with facts, logic, and references as appropriate. When asked to provide feedback on your peer's discussion posts, simply stating, for example, "Yes," "No," "I agree," or "I don't think so" is not acceptable will not be considered participation. As a guideline, I recommend your original written posts should be at least 150 words and replies to your peers should be at least 100 words. I expect regular participation and active students will demonstrate that by regular posts that meet the requirements and deadlines.

Quizzes. There will be both AP (Associated Press) Style quizzes and quizzes on the content throughout the semester to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and other assignments. Quizzes must be completed by Sunday night at 11:59 p.m. (CST). Check the course schedule for specific dates. Quizzes are timed and you must complete the quiz in the time allotted. Missed quizzes cannot be made up.

Graded Items

AP style quizzes, 5 @ 15 points each 5%

Course quizzes, 7 @ various points 10%

PR Writing Assignments 60%

- News release #1 (with option to revise & resubmit)
- Write a blog post
- Media pitch
- Write a backgrounder
- Write a fact sheet
- Write a professional email
- Create a brochure
- Write a news lead
- News release #2
- Identify a blogger (discussion post)
- Write talking points (discussion post)

Other assignments 25%

- Twitter chat & collection with reflection
- LinkedIn personal branding activity
- Write your bio sketch
- Pick an organization (discussion post)
- Find a news release (discussion post)
- Critique a news release
- Share your Twitter handle (discussion post)

AI/ChatGPT

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course. Once permission is granted, AI may only be used as directed. Assignment submissions may run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an assignment. Be prepared to submit any prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

Questions About Grades

You are responsible for tracking your grade online and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade. Meeting early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-instructor understanding and quality of work.

Plagiarism policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, plus required meeting with me

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo

Third offense: Automatic class fail

**Any instances of plagiarism may result in a note being added to your department file.

Late work: In the field of public relations, deadlines are imperative. As such, learning to work within deadlines for the course is expected. As we all know, life circumstances arise that are out of our control. That said, extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis at my discretion.

Assignments not received by the posted deadline will be automatically assigned a zero in the gradebook. I will then update grades for any late work received in accordance with the following policy:

- Automatic 10% deduction for each day the item is late up to **3 days**.
- Work **more than 3 days late** will be assigned a zero and will not be accepted.

Grading

Letter grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

A 90% - 100%; B 80% - 89.9%; C 70% - 79.9%; D 60% - 69.9%; F Below 60%

A=Professional quality work that could be used with little or no modification

B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally

C=Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision

D=Barely satisfies the minimum requirement and below average quality

F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirements

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please visit Canvas to review the weekly course schedule.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in PBRL 3421

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)

- Understand how public relations writing tactics can tell stories and build relationships across a variety of disciplines and careers.
- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products
- Structure messages on the appropriate channels to reach diverse target audience.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.

- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- Understand the differences between writing for various media.
- Evaluate their own and other's public relations writing for accuracy, clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style, as well as suitability for specified medium.
- Understand their own role as a content creator influences culture, norms, and discourse.

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and engagement exercises.
- Define an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Identify appropriate multimedia components to accompany public relations writing based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Name and illustrate common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write a press release, fact sheet, media pitch, and email, in addition to participating in a Twitter chat, drafting a personal bio, and completing the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes and introductions and reflection pieces).
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written public relations materials.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.
- Associate successful outcomes with the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Give examples about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.

Understanding

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.
- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Examine potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Identify which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

Application

- Write a press release, fact sheet, media pitch, and email, in addition to participating in a Twitter chat, drafting a personal bio, and completing the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes and introductions and reflection pieces).
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that

products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for

the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment

must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.