MCM 381: Public Relations Writing

Spring 2016 Syllabus

Professor: Phillip Madison, Ph.D.

Class Time/Location: MWF 10:00-10:50am/ Boynton 202

Office: 204 Boynton

Office Hours: MWF 12pm-1pm, T/TH 9:15am-10:30am and by appointment

Email: madisontp@sfasu.edu

Office Phone: (936) 468-1050

Materials:

- A reliable USB flash drive for saving work.
- Recommended Text: AP Stylebook

Course Description:

- This course is an intensive laboratory workshop in public relations designed to introduce students to the various styles and formats of writing for public relations. Fundamentals of writing for publications, including newsletters, house journals, news releases, pamphlets, and brochures. Prerequisites: MCM 205 with a grade of C or higher and MCM 380.
- The course emphasizes the strategy of crafting and delivering a public relations message that includes pre-writing, preparation and editing as well as the development of a message planner outline on which the public relations writing and strategy is based.

Program Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate the ability to write effectively across a variety of platforms appropriate to the discipline.
• Gather, organize and analyze discipline-appropriate research and communication information about it.
• Understand the role of media in society.
• Comprehend legal and ethical principles relating to media.
• Demonstrate the application of media technology, terminology and techniques.

Student Learning Outcomes:

• Understand how to define various audiences and segment audiences according to their needs, interests, preferences and demographics.
• Show proficiency in writing and designing public relations copy for a variety of media, publics, and contexts.
• Demonstrate skills in writing copy on long and short deadlines and within space requirements.
• Demonstrate skills in copy revision and proofreading.
• Demonstrate knowledge of Associated Press style requirements.
• Demonstrate competence in writing for each stage of the public relations process.

Professional values and competences addressed in this course:

• Truth, accuracy and fairness
• The diversity of audiences
• Writing clearly and accurately
• Using the tools of technology

General Routine of Class

• I will lecture, give in-class activities, and we will have discussions on Mondays and Wednesdays.
• Most Fridays will be reserved for in-class writing. Assignments will be due at the end of class on Friday (NO EXCEPTIONS).
• I suggest you have your work around 90% complete before coming to class on Friday. DO NOT RELY ON ONE HOUR OF CLASS TO GET YOUR WORK DONE. To do quality work, you will have to spend time outside of class.
• With each new module you will find many supplemengary resources in D2L. Such resources include news articles about PR writing, samples of different types of documents, and videos. I will not discuss all of them in class and may not even mention some of them, but I post these for your benefit and to help you get through the assignments. It is up to you to actually engage the materials if
you wish to learn from them. The alternative is requiring you to buy an $80-$100 textbook that will probably be outdated within months of your purchase. I feel textbook prices are unfair to you and will continue to provide up-to-date materials whether you read them or not.

- You may turn work in early if you so desire, or if you need a Friday for other school activities. Late work will not be accepted without documentation of emergency, school trip, or something PR or advertising-related.
- When we write, we become so accustomed to seeing our mistakes that we no longer see them, and develop blind spots. Therefore, I STRONGLY recommend you get others to look at your work before you turn it in on Fridays.
- As I mentioned, you will be allowed to revise your work before submitting a final copy and I am happy to take a look at it. I will even give you some of my time on Fridays to review it before you turn in a final draft.
- I review your work as a favor to you, not an obligation, and I will not be held accountable for your writing mistakes. That said, I will try to catch as many errors as I can during these readings and point them out to you, but invariably there will be errors that I do not catch in the initial drafts that make their way into the final drafts. This is especially true with writers who do not spend time revising their work.
- The bottom line is this: YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT YOU WRITE – MAKE SURE YOU CATCH ANY ERRORS THAT I MISS AND FIX THEM FOR YOUR FINAL DRAFTS.
- Finally, you will work for real clients; you will meet them, ask them questions, interact with them, and produce usable work they may use in their own PR agendas. You will not leave this class without pieces for a portfolio or entries on your resume. THE WORK YOU DO IN THIS CLASS IS REAL-LIFE WORK – previous students have parlayed their work in my writing classes into internships and jobs.

Grading:

- Social Media: 5%
- Assignments: 60%
- Participation: 5%
- Mini-Campaign: 30%

Grading Scale: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, 59 and below = F.
Coursework:

- **Social Media:** Companies are looking for new recruits who are digitally savvy and truly passionate about the industry. For this assignment, each student will make (at least) 20 social media posts throughout the semester. The tweets must somehow benefit the various clients we take on. Tweets can be links to interesting stories about our clients, interesting PR campaigns or tactics they use, events they may be hosting, or other online material related to PR and our clients. **You must include the hashtag #mcm381 on your posts in addition to any hashtags our clients use** so we can all follow along with others’ tweets (and so you can get credit). Make sure to adjust the privacy settings on your posts to insure that I can see them when I search for them. If I can’t see your posts, I can’t give credit. You might also consider using @philmadison in your tweets or tag me in photos on Facebook just to make sure I see them.

- **Assignments:** This is a writing-intensive lab class, thus there will be at least 12 writing assignments to complete. Many of these assignments will be completed in class, and you will print out your assignment at the end of class to turn in to the professor. The writing assignments prepare you for the final project. All assignments are expected to be typed and use 12-point font. Some assignments will be double spaced while others will be single-spaced – I will let you know beforehand. All writing should be clear and concise and conform to AP style rules. You must turn in your assignments to the D2L Dropbox to receive credit. No make-up work will be allowed for unexcused absences, and you will receive a zero for any missed assignments. To be excused, an absence must be recognized as valid by SFASU and documentation must be provided to the professor. There are some in-class activities that will not be graded, but instead will count toward your participation grade.

- **Participation:** This course relies heavily on active participation, and it includes many in-class assignments. Attendance and participation are vital to success and learning. If you are not here, you may lose participation credit unless your absence is excused. To be excused, an absence must be recognized as valid by both SFA and the professor, and documentation must be provided to the professor.

Additional participation credit will be given for your active participation in class discussions. To receive full participation credit, you must consistently and actively contribute to class discussion in a way that demonstrates a firm grasp of the material covered and adds to the learning experience of your fellow classmates. Active participation does not mean talking simply to talk or coming to class each day. I expect you to come to class prepared, to ask insightful
questions, and to offer constructive, coherent contributions. Read all materials before class and be ready to discuss them.

- **Final Project- Mini-Campaign**: The final project requires groups of students to utilize the knowledge conveyed and skills covered in this course to create essential public relations collateral materials (i.e. press releases, fact sheets, public service announcements, etc.) based on the needs of a real-life client whom the instructor will assign. For this project, you will work in class and out of class with your group, conduct research on those audiences with whom you believe the client should communicate in order to achieve their public relations and communications objectives, and create a plan from which your writing will be based.

At the end of the semester, each group will turn in a written campaign plan that includes research, planning, and at least 3 collateral pieces. Further, each group will give a 15-minute presentation during the last week of class in lieu of a final exam. Afterward, each member of the group will complete an anonymous peer evaluation of the other members in the group. It is imperative that you provide peer reviews, and I have worked it in as a component of your final campaign grades. A more detailed outline of this assignment will be posted online, and I will share work that my previous students have done to help guide the process.

**PRSSA**

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) is a student organization whose membership is open to any SFA student. PRSSA regularly features guest speakers, as well as additional opportunities to learn more about the field of PR. This is a formative time in your lives, and any experiences outside the classroom that you have can help shape the course of the rest of your life. I cannot give extra credit for joining the organization, but STRONGLY ENCOURAGE you to do so, as it opens up many, many doors to your future careers.

**Communicating with Dr. Madison**

For communicating to all members of the class, I use Facebook. Please join Dr. Madison's PR Writing (MCM-381) Facebook Group before reading the next sentence. I also use D2L, but one caveat: I rarely check my D2L e-mail and D2L is not set up to interact well with other e-mail systems. You will get quicker responses via Facebook, e-mailing me directly at the email address listed above, or just coming by during my office hours.
Also, I do not generally check e-mail after 5pm, but will get to your e-mails/posts as soon as I can.

Policies

- **Academic Integrity (A-9.1)** Students in this class are expected to read and abide by the university policy on academic integrity. If a student is found in violation of this policy, he/she will be subject to receiving a failing grade for this course, and the violation will be reported to the proper university authorities. Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Original writing is essential to ethical public relations. It is also essential for this class. Cheating is any action that violates University norms or an instructor's guidelines for the preparation and submission of assignments. Such actions may include using or providing unauthorized assistance or materials on course assignments or possessing unauthorized materials during an exam.

Plagiarism involves the representation of another's work as your own, for example: (a) Submitting as one's own any material that is copied from published or unpublished sources such as the Internet, print sources, or video programs without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else’s. (b) Paraphrasing another’s views, opinions or insights without proper acknowledgement or copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination, paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else.

If you are unsure about what constitutes unauthorized help on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution, please ask your instructor. NOTE: Violations may result in the failure of the assignment, failure of the course, and additional disciplinary actions with the university.

- **Classroom Preparedness**: Students should attend class and participate in class discussions. Students should complete readings before the class in which they are discussed. Finally, students should check email, Facebook, and D2L frequently for the latest class information and updates.

- **Classroom Conduct**: Appropriate and professional classroom conduct is expected at all times. Respect and common courtesy toward your classmates and your instructor are required.
• **Diversity:** Effective public relations relies on the ability to recognize and embrace diversity in all its forms, including viewpoints. Be respectful of the diverse range of opinions of everyone in the class.

• **Cell Phones/Technology:** Silence your cell phone before class. No text messaging/Facebooking/web surfing during class. If you do this you will be asked to leave.

• **Grade Challenges:** Grades will not be discussed via email, the telephone or in class. If you disagree with a grade given on any assignment, you must appeal the grade in person during my office hours or in an appointment with me. In this appeal, you must clearly state the problem and give a clear, concise explanation as to why you feel the grade is inaccurate. You must appeal assigned grades within one week of your receiving that particular grade. After one week, all grades are final.

• **Deadlines:** The practice of public relations hinges on meeting deadlines. Missing deadlines not only can damage a public relations professional’s credibility, it can lead to dismissal. Thus, deadlines are treated seriously in this class. You need to show up for class. If you miss class, you will not do well in this course. I do not grade on attendance. However, if you miss a graded assignment when you are absent, you will not be able to make that material up unless your absence is an officially excused absence, recognized by the University, with proper documentation.

• **Withdrawal Policy:** Per the Registrar’s Office, the last day to drop the course without a “WP or WF” is March 19, 2014.

• **Students with Disabilities:** To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations.

• **Grade Withheld Policy (Semester Grades A-54):** Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

• **Professor’s Academic Freedom Policy:** Some of the material dealt with in this class may be perceived of as controversial or offensive to some students. While students are encouraged to respond to the material and to freely offer their opinions, if any student becomes uncomfortable with any of the topics or finds any of the material questionable, that student is urged to contact the professor about an alternative assignment.
• **Academic dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit. Using other's speeches or preexisting PowerPoint presentations is considered academic dishonesty and will be treated accordingly.

• **Online Writing Resources:** Purdue Owl is a useful resource for any writer: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/) as well as the AP Stylebook: [http://www.apstylebook.com/sfasu_edu/](http://www.apstylebook.com/sfasu_edu/).

**Boynton Lab Schedule**
The Boynton Lab will be available for weekly use. The lab schedule will be posted by the second week of the semester. Questions, comments, complaints are welcome and should be directed to Mr. Greg Patterson ([gpatterson@sfasu.edu](mailto:gpatterson@sfasu.edu)) during office hours.

**Lab Facility, Computers, and Printers**
Food and/or drinks are not allowed in the lab due to the nature of the equipment. Please help us with this policy by being responsible with yourself first. Printing that is unrelated to your registered class (which uses Boynton 202 or 209 labs) may revoke ALL printing privileges. Printing to the Color Printer requires approval and must be for specific class assignments. Lab assistants are available for general assistance. If you experience a problem with computer equipment, please note the problem in detail, computer used and report this information to the lab assistant.
**Tentative Course Schedule for MCM 381 (Revised 12/25/2015)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Mondays</th>
<th>Wednesdays</th>
<th>Fridays</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/19-23/15</td>
<td>MLK DAY-No Class</td>
<td>Intro to Course</td>
<td>Lecture: What is PR Writing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>01/25-29/15</td>
<td>Basics of PR Writing</td>
<td>Basics of PR Writing Activity 2.1</td>
<td>Eliminating Jargon</td>
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<td>02/01-05/15</td>
<td>The PR Process</td>
<td>PR Process Continued</td>
<td>No Class (Advertising Candidate visiting)</td>
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<td>02/08-12/15</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Research (Continued)</td>
<td>Secondary Research Assignment Due</td>
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<td>Activity (TBA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>02/15-19/15</td>
<td>Planning and Message</td>
<td>Planning and Message Design</td>
<td>Planning Due</td>
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<td>Activity (TBA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>02/22-26/15</td>
<td>News Releases</td>
<td>News Releases</td>
<td>News Release Due</td>
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<td>Social Media Posts Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>02/29-03/04</td>
<td>Other Media Formats</td>
<td>Other Media Formats Activity (TBA)</td>
<td>Media Alerts and Pitches Due</td>
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<td>03/07-11/15</td>
<td>Backgrounders</td>
<td>Backgrounders</td>
<td>Backgrounders Due</td>
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<td>03/14-18/15</td>
<td><strong>SPRING BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>03/21-25/15</td>
<td>Advocacy Writing</td>
<td>Advocacy Writing</td>
<td>Easter -- No Class</td>
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<td>03/28-04/01</td>
<td>Business Correspondence</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<td>Assignments Due at Beginning of Class</td>
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<td>04/04-08/15</td>
<td>Lecture: Features</td>
<td>SSCA -- No Class</td>
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<td>04/11-15/15</td>
<td>Features 2.0</td>
<td>Features Work Day</td>
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<td>04/18-22/15</td>
<td>Meet the Client:</td>
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<td>Dr. E. Oliphant, School of Social Work</td>
<td>Planning Lecture</td>
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<td>Bios</td>
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<td>04/25-29/01</td>
<td>Mini Campaign: Writing (In Class)</td>
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<td>05/02-06/15</td>
<td>Mini Campaign: Writing (In Class)</td>
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<td>05/09-13/15</td>
<td>FINALS</td>
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<td>Social Media Posts Due</td>
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