

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY
Department of Communication

PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING – COMM 3950, pre-requisites COMM 1140, 1950
Fall 2006

Instructor: Stan Gwin

Office: **CN 213 D**; Office Hours: **9:30-11:00 TTh ; 2:30-4:00TWTh**

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Course Fee: \$15

Course Description: Public Relations Writing is a service learning course. This course emphasizes refining writing skills by planning, designing, and composing various documents, proposals, press releases, news stories, feature stories, scripts, advertising and promotional copy, position papers, speeches, brochures, and special publications normally used in public relations practice. The course begins with finding an appropriate client for your group and developing the writing exercise cases for that client throughout the semester.

ADA Statement: Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids will need to contact the Southern Utah University Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), in room 206F of the Sharwan Smith Center or phone (435) 865 8022. SSD determines eligibility for and authorizes the provision of services.

Objectives

1. Students will learn and be able to execute writing necessary for each of the public relations venues including press releases, position papers, feature articles, newsletters, brochures, speeches, direct mail letters, media messages and scripts, and political ads and special documents.
2. Students will grasp the ethical differences between public relations and propaganda and be able to write information-based public relations messages avoiding propaganda.
3. Student will understand and be able to execute power writing built upon strong verbs.
4. Students will learn and practice the skills of active voice, terse prose, god and devil terms, and oral mode prose.

Course Requirements: Public Relations Writing is about developing writing skills. So class work and evaluation centers upon continuous writing activities.

1. PR writing activities will be addressed from the cases examined in class for your group's client each week. Sixteen cases will be scheduled to be addressed in class. At least ten different writing assignments must be completed and scored from cases to pass. 50 points each. You must complete and have at least ten cases evaluated in your portfolio. These cases will not be accepted for credit unless turned in during the week assigned. Assignments are due on Monday of the week specified and will be refined by your class group and your instructor during the week before being turned in in class by Friday. Assignments not checked off on Monday for work may not be turned in on Friday. Missed assignments are not accepted late except by special permission of the instructor.
2. Students will be divided into teams to develop portfolio projects from real clients. Teams will meet with the instructor weekly to discuss strategies and writing assignments. Client summaries and the portfolio are due at the end of week 14. 250 points.
3. e-journals. Optional. Each student should e-mail a journal message to the instructor at least 2 times a week. The instructor will respond and the e-mails will build into a journal as they go back and forth. Entries should be short and can be about anything relevant – the course, assignments, workload, etc. Regular journal entries can produce up to 100 points by the end of the term.
4. Additional case based writing activities can produce up to 25 points apiece to increase scoring as needed. Instructor approval is required to authorize bonus cases. Up to 100 points may be accumulated from additional cases. Students are also encouraged to submit PR writing from other venues (i.e. part-time job or internship) for credit in this category.

Grading

940 points are required for an A; 900 for an A-; 870 for a B+; 840 for a B; 800 for a B-; 780 for a C+; 740 for a C; 700 for a C-; 680 for a D+; 640 for a D; 600 for a D-; anything under 600 fails the course.

Schedule

1. Cases are assigned in above and go constantly throughout the term.
2. Client work for portfolios will begin after the fourth week and final materials will be due at the last class day.
3. Students writing journals will start immediately and continue through the term. No credit will be given for journals with fewer than two entries per week. Entries cannot be made up except with permission. Extra credit may be awarded for more extensive entries and clear demonstration of extraordinary improvement in writing.

Course Policies

1. The content and skills discussed in class are in response to need expressed by students completing cases rather than lectures and every class will contain material relevant to projects. Missing classes is unwise.
2. Textbook. The chapters in the text are scheduled for reading prior to activities practicing those skill areas.. If you have not read the material and prepared the cases prior to class, class activities will not be productive. Please start with the first week and read one Unit per week ahead of me. We will discuss how to read and use the book on the first day of class.
3. Cheating. Do not cheat. If you do you fail the class. Cheating includes plagiarism and/or acquiring any material from any source other than your own recall, intelligence, and research. Give credit where you use material from other sources. Any sources quoted in writing must be included with the assignment.
4. House rules. The following house writing rules will be expanded as we go along. Write and edit by the rules. Such lists of rules a common in PR practice. Personal writing rules will be developed during the semester and be the first entry in your portfolio at the end.
 - a. Passive constructions are not allowed.
 - b. Indefinite pronouns are not allowed (especially the indefinite “it”) and are not permitted.
 - c. “This”, “that,” “these”, and “those” are not nouns and must always be followed by nouns when used.
 - d. The verb “to be” avoided in all its forms. Cultivate strong verbs.
 - e. Cliché’ is not permitted in any form.

These are easy. There will be more. The “twenty tips” document passed out in class is a good start.

Final Comment

Public Relations Writing is a class where we will try to hone the use of skills we’ve learned in other Communication courses. We will work steadily and hard on improving the writing skills essential to success in beginning PR jobs. It’s a critical course. Materials created and retained from this class may very well be the skill demonstration portfolio entries that get you your first job.