

MC 4001: Public Relations Writing **Fall 2005**
Dr. Jinx Broussard, Associate Professor
Meeting Time: **12:40 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**
Meeting Place: **Journalism 111**
Office: **208 Hodges Hall**
Office Hours: **9:30 a.m.-11:30 p.m. Wednesdays**
Office Phone: **225-578-7603**
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Service-Learning Partners

CAWS (Capital Area Association for Welfare of School Children)

Contact Information: Valerie Jackson Jones, (o) 225-924-7506, (fax) 225-924-5165;
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United Methodist HOPE Ministries

Contact Information: Renee Craft, (o) 225-355-0702; RenCraft@aol.com

O'Brien House

Contact Information: Katherine Martin, (o) 225-344-6345, (fax) 225-344-0119; and/or Brenda Perry, 225-343-8330 www.obrienhouse.com

Prerequisite: MC 2010 (Media Writing), reasonable typing ability, and strong foundation in the English language

Required Texts and Materials:

Dennis L. Wilcox, *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques*, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001).

The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual (You can purchase from the LSU Bookstore or from online bookstores via the Internet.)

A dictionary, thesaurus, and preformatted disk to store all class assignments.

Suggested Reading

Wall Street Journal

Public Relations Strategists (free from Public Relations Society of America), *PR Week*, and/or *PR Tactics*

One business-oriented magazine (*Business Week*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *City Business*)

USA Today

Suggested Viewing/Listening

One daily network television newscast

"All Things Considered" on National Public Radio (daily)

Introduction to Public Relations Writing

This is a professional course in print and broadcast copy writing and related to public relations activities. You will obtain knowledge of the basic principles of public relations writing and gain experience in writing for public relations. The primary objective of this class is to make you more proficient in the various forms of public relations writing targeted to specific audiences. These forms of public relations writing include news releases, fact sheets, media lists, speeches, feature stories, letters, memoranda, company histories, advertising and advertorials,

commentary (such as letters to the editor or opinion pieces), newsletters and brochures. In the process of studying and practicing writing, we will discuss the role of public relations in organizations. This background is essential to the composition of successful messages.

Service-Learning

MC4001 is a service-learning course, which is defined as:

...a course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (from Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Course Objectives

Overall goals include developing proficiency in public relations writing, developing critical thinking skills that make you better communicators, honing language and style skills that will allow you to produce written materials that are clear, accurate, creative and stylistically acceptable to the public relations profession; and to satisfy a service-learning requirement that will help you learn about the community while producing items for a professional portfolio that will be of interest to prospective employers.

Specific-Learning Outcomes

- 1) Develop skills in writing public relations releases for all print, electronic, and out-of-home media.
- 2) Develop skills in designing and writing public relations copy for a variety of consumer markets.
- 3) Develop skills in composing at the keyboard and in writing copy on long and short deadline notices and within space and time requirements.
- 4) Develop skills in copy revision and proofreading.
- 5) Develop skills in judging creative work and accepting critical appraisal of your own work.
- 6) Develop understanding of Associate Press style requirements.
- 7) Develop strategies for enhancing your own creative ability.
- 8) Develop understanding of changes that have occurred in public relations creative styles in response to changing social, economic and technological conditions.
- 9) Enhance portfolio via student media publication or broadcast of class assigned projects.

Service-Learning Goals and Objectives

- 1) To demonstrate an understanding of social issues in our community.
- 2) To demonstrate an understanding of civic responsibility.
- 3) To demonstrate an understanding of social issues through reflective essays, class discussion, and presentation.
- 4) To demonstrate an understanding of civic responsibility through reflective essays, class discussion, and presentation.

Guidelines for Service-Learning Project

You will engage in a 25-hour service-learning project at one of three local nonprofits that I will assign on the first day of class. This project will enable you to go beyond obtaining workplace style experience and apply established principles of public relations writing, but assisting the nonprofit agency as it seeks to meet specific community needs.

The class will be divided into three groups, with each group being assigned to a specific nonprofit. On the first day of class, you will meet with the organization's public relations director

or contact person to discuss specific projects on which you can work during the four months of the semester. Those projects can include developing and providing content for a web site or newsletter, writing press releases and feature stories for publication in internal and external media, promotional material for a special event, to name a few. Each group and the representative of the nonprofit will sign a letter of agreement outlining the tasks that you have agreed to complete and the assistance and resources the organization will agree to provide to help you complete the project. You will turn this in at the second class meeting.

You will keep a log of the dates and times you meet with the contact person and the work that you do. You will engage in on-going class discussions (reflections) about your project and experiences, as well as via two written reflections.

Guidelines for Reflections:

1. Reflections must be typed—12 point font
2. Reflections must be at least 3 pages
3. Reflections MUST answer the following questions:

Reflection #1 ***Due during fourth week of class***

- a. What is the mission of the nonprofit and how can you assist it in carrying out its mission? (Be specific).
- b. What is your view of civic and social responsibility and what role does public relations play in helping nonprofits bring about the betterment of society?
- c. What challenges and opportunities have you been presented with?

Reflection #1 ***Due two weeks before finals***

- a. *What did you do?*
- b. *How did your experience relate to this class?*
- c. *How did your experience contribute to your awareness of societal and community needs?*
- d. *To what extent did your service-learning project motivate you to engage civically?*
- e. *Has your view of civic and social responsibility changed during the course of this class? Why or why not?*
- f. *What, if any, ethical challenges did you encounter while working with your client?*

(Reflections will be graded on the quality of writing (see below) and the extent to which you display critical thinking to answer the questions.)

Expectations and Policies

Our focus will be on preparing writing exercises and assignments, group interaction, and classroom discussions about public relations writing and the profession of public relations. Because you have completed writing prerequisites for this course, you are expected to have good fundamental skills of writing for print and broadcast media. To assess those skills, I will give quizzes on grammar, spelling and AP style until such time as you demonstrate that you have mastered the areas.

Lectures will be kept to a minimum. Our goal is to learn from practice and from each other. That is why a great deal of time will be spent practicing skills necessary to doing outside writing assignments well and critiquing your work. In addition to receiving grades for your classroom and outside assignments, you will produce three different public relations pieces—a press release, a feature story or profile for the employee newsletter, and a brochure or web page design—for the nonprofit. As a result, you will come out of the course with clips to add to your

writing portfolios. You will turn in a rough draft of those pieces as you complete them. I will critique the pieces and give suggestions for improvement to help increase your chances of publication. Do not wait until the end of the semester to produce your pieces, because such a delay can limit your chances of getting the pieces published or used by the nonprofit organization.

You should read, view, and listen to the media for which you will be writing, including mass and specialized media. I will, therefore, give periodic current events quizzes. You should come to class having already read what is assigned to you in the text for that week. In addition to textbook assignments, I may ask you to read assigned works that I place on reserve in the library, as well as journal articles.

Attending class and meeting writing deadlines are absolutely essential to being successful in this class. Quizzes and in-class writing exercises will be a part of nearly every class session, and if you are absent or late, you run the risk of missing an assignment. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of a class period. You will not be allowed to take the quizzes if you are more than 10 minutes late. You must turn in all assignments when due, including those that are conducted in class. Outside assignments are due at the start of each class. I will not accept late work unless you are absent for a family or medical emergency. If you miss an assignment, quiz, examination or if you are unable to complete them due to tardiness, you will receive a zero.

Excused absences are those recognized by LSU: illness, family emergency, and special curricular/ extracurricular requirements. You or someone in your immediate family must be seriously ill or have a serious problem in order for me to extend any writing assignment deadline, and you must present documentation of the reason for your absence in writing as soon as possible. Routine medical appointments, job interviews and research for a class assignment are not valid reasons for missing class. If you miss class, you have an obligation to check with me or a classmate about the assignments or information you miss. The policy on makeup work and missed assignments is not flexible.

Anticipated absences should be handled in the following way. If you are participating in a university-sponsored activity, let me know the reason for your absence in writing as far in advance as possible. If a scheduled outside writing project is due while you are away, you have the responsibility to turn it in early before you leave town, with a brief written note about your absence. When you return, you can then see me about making up the in-class assignments you missed, including quizzes. It is my choice whether to allow you to make up work missed because of an anticipated or unanticipated absence. The best way to ensure being allowed to do make ups is to have a valid reason for missing class, documentation for that absence and quick contact with me.

Eating, drinking, inappropriate talking, and use of cell phones and pagers are prohibited.

All assignments submitted for an in-class or out-of-class grade must be typed or computer-generated and submitted on 8.5 by 11 inch paper (unless you are instructed otherwise). No handwritten materials will be accepted (unless we have computer problems in the classroom). For writing assignments, you should leave at least a 1-inch margin top and bottom. You may use handwritten copy editing marks to make last minute corrections to your work. All assignments must be typed in 12-point type with one-inch margins with the exception of copy that is part of a layout.

Grading:

In-class and outside writing assignments and exercises will make up sixty percent of the grading for this course. The exercises and assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale using 10-point increments between. Your service-learning project will make up forty percent of your grade. In order to be eligible for the maximum points on your individual project for the non-profit, you will need to have two of the three pieces published by the end of the semester. This can include having the press release sent out to and used by the media, the brochure published and distributed to the organization's publics and the feature story used in an organizational publication.

For all of your work, a premium is placed on accuracy and grammatical correctness. You will lose points for repeating the same mistakes from paper to paper. You should take comments on your papers as constructive criticism intended to help you avoid repeating serious errors. We are striving for steady improvement in the quality of the work you submit.

Graduate students will be expected to do an extra outside writing assignment at the discretion of the instructor. Graduate students will be held to a higher standard of performance than undergraduates on all writing assignments and exams.

You can earn a maximum of three extra credit bonus points to add to your final grade. I do not guarantee, however, that extra credit opportunities will be provided. In addition, each opportunity will be offered to the entire class. I will not allow individual assignments for extra credit.

The grading scale is 90-100= A, 89-80=B, 79-70=C, 69-60-D, 59 and below, F.

Your final grade will be based on the following structure:

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| 1. Writing and class assignments (7) | 40% |
| 2. Exams | 15% |
| 3. Quizzes | 5% |
| 4. Service-Learning Project | 40% |

Using a rubric, you will be graded on the service-learning project as follows:

- a. attendance at the site and quality of service (site supervisor evaluation)—15 points
- b. reflections—15 points
- c. portfolio of published materials—10 points

Public relations writing assignments will be evaluated on the following:

Style and content are appropriate for the target publics
Style and format are appropriate for the medium you are using
Content meets objectives
Structure is appropriate: introduction. Organization, transitions
Grammar and syntax
Sentence structure
Spelling and punctuation
Accuracy

Writing is interesting and informative
Completeness. Reader is not left with any questions

You will receive an F and 0 credit when you do not submit an assignment. *Each* factual error (including misspelled name) will receive a deduction of 10 points. *Each* error in AP style, grammar, and punctuation will lower your grade by 5 points.

The letter grade for writing assignments will be as follows:

A = Outstanding work: Strong in every category, especially newsworthiness. Copy is usually publishable with little or no editing.

B = Good work. Many strong points. Copy is usually publishable with minor editing and revision.

C = Satisfactory work. Some strong points. Copy needs additional reporting /rewriting.

D = Serious problems with reporting and/or writing. Weak. Copy contains major factual, structural, writing, or usage flaws.

F. Unacceptable work. Copy fails to meet even minimum standards for the assignment. Not newsworthy, persuasive. Missed deadline.

Once these points have been deducted, the overall quality of the story will determine the number of remaining points you will receive.

Academic Honesty

Cheating on a test will result in failure of that test. Plagiarism will result in failure of the particular assignment. Any instance of academic dishonesty may be reported to the Provost's office.

Students with Disabilities: Students with a disability that may require some accommodation on my part must speak with me as early as possible in the course. You should also contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities to obtain the necessary documentation of your disability to share with me.

Diversity Statement: The Manship School of Mass Communication follows the policy of Louisiana State University as stated in Affirmation Action Plan, Vol. 1:

LSU firmly supports the national policy of Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity as outlined in the University's Affirmative Action Play. The University policy of equal opportunity will be administered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, physical or mental disability, marital status, veteran's status in the admissions to, participation in, and treatment or employment in the programs and activities which the University operates and sponsors.

The Manship School recognizes that our success hinges upon strong values that permeate the way we interact with society's future leaders. Honesty, integrity and respect for others are central to everything we do. We also recognize that as a community, our students, staff and faculty should reflect the society in which we live and work. This means a diverse Manship community is one of our most important resources. We are richer because of the different cultures, races, genders, sexual orientations and perspectives that find a home in the Manship School. We embrace and promote these unique backgrounds that are essential to our success as a leader in higher education.

Diversity means creating an environment of inclusion, in which all students, staff and faculty can grow to their fullest potential, thereby enhancing productivity and positively influencing all educational goals.

Course Calendar

Week 1	Introductions and course overview Public relations and the writer Finding and Generating News Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation Classmate interview assignment Identify your nonprofit	Chs. 1 & 3
Week 2	Persuasive Writing Writing for Clarity Working with the Media	Chs. 2 & 11
Week 3	Law and Ethics AP Style Quiz	Chs. 4
Week 4	Writing Pitch Letters and Memos Press Releases	Ch. 8 Ch. 5
Week 5	Features AP Style Quiz	Ch. 6
Week 6	Op Ed/ Pieces, Media Alerts, Press Kits AP Style Quiz (If necessary)	Chs. 8 & 11
Week 7	Newsletters and Magazines Exam #1	Ch. 12
Week 8	Field Experience Op-ed Piece Due	
Week 9	Broadcast	Ch. 12
Week 10	Letters, e-mails, and reports PSA Due	Ch. 10
Week 11	Distribution: Snail Mail to Internet	Ch. 10
Week 12	Speeches & Other Presentations	Ch.16
Week 13	World Wide Web	Ch. 18
Week 14	PR Campaigns	
Week 14	All Nonprofit Organization Projects Due Presentations / Evaluation	

Assigned readings should be completed before class. Additional reading will be assigned throughout the semester.

Because public relations is a dynamic and changing field, and because this course handles “real world” cases and clients in “real time,” this schedule may have to be modified during the semester.