

**Syllabus**  
**CAP 423: Writing Corporate Communications**  
**Professor Tim Penning, Ph.D., APR**

Winter 2016  
Mon-Wed, 4:30-5:45 p.m.  
ASH 2146

LSH 124, 331-3478  
Penningt@gvsu.edu  
Office hours: Mon 12-2; Tues 1-3

**Course Description**

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This course is designed to prepare public relations students with both knowledge of and practice in appropriate writing skills used in the public relations profession. The emphasis is on the corporate communications tools NOT used in media relations (CAP 321) and using communication tools that are appropriate for different audiences and objectives. This is not just a “how-to” course with simple instructions for writing different PR tactics; rather, the course stresses an persuasive, strategic, behavioral approach to PR writing.

**Prerequisites**

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There are no prerequisites, but students should have completed CAP 220, 320.

**Course Objectives**

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1. Develop the habit of “thinking before inking,” of integrating critical thinking and strategy with tactical production.
2. Understand the relationship between organizational mission/objectives and PR writing.
3. Develop skills in finding and presenting information clearly and accurately.
4. Achieve ability to conduct a communications audit and write a communications plan.
5. Foster creativity and writing ability on a diverse range of PR writing tools and projects.
6. Write a variety of PR pieces suitable for a portfolio.
7. Work with a client on ‘real-world’ PR writing assignments.

**Drop Deadline**

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The deadline to drop this class and receive a “W” is March 11, at 5 p.m.

## Required Texts

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- *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, by Dennis Wilcox and Bryan Reber
- *Persuasion: Theory and Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, by Daniel O'Keefe
  
- *Recommended: When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style*, by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald
- Students should also have the Associated Press (AP) style book.
- Additional reading assignments will be posted to Blackboard or handed out during the semester. These are REQUIRED readings.

## Course Process

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Following several classes of 'foundation' lectures on the persuasion theory principles and strategies of PR writing, as well as how PR writing and corporate communications should be consistent with organizational objectives, the class will follow a weekly format of discussion/application:

*Wednesdays*-- lecture/discussion and critiques of examples of a particular type of PR writing or tactic. Students must have read assigned chapters from the textbook and all additional readings posted to Blackboard for the week, and come to class with a written critique of the sample tactic posted to Blackboard (samples for critique are in a separate folder). Critiques will be discussed and then turned in for a grade. (Students will also turn in a completed tactic for the client, revised from the edit session the previous Monday).

*Mondays*—students must come to class with a complete draft they have written of the tactic discussed in the previous Wednesday session. The subject of the draft will be the client(s) for the class this semester. The class period will be devoted to thoughtful peer review and professor feedback of student work. Points will be given for having a complete draft and engaging in thoughtful critique and revision in class (if draft is not complete student will receive a ZERO for the assignment, i.e. no final draft will be accepted). Students will have til the next Wednesday class period to make final revisions to turn in a final draft for a grade. Turn in: draft, peer review form, final copy.

Since this class does not meet in a computer lab, writing will be done outside of class and reviewed by peers and the professor in class on Wednesdays.

See more information below under "course requirements."

## Course Requirements

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### *Sample Writing Critiques*

- Once we get to the point in the semester where we will discuss a different tactic each week, you will be expected to come to class with a one-page written critique of an example tactic provided on Blackboard or by handout.
- You should base your critiques on the readings in the book and Blackboard and any handouts as well as your own critical thinking about the writing of the piece from a

PR perspective. Focus should be on the WRITING. If your critique does not show evidence of class lecture or readings, you will receive a very low grade. These critiques will be discussed in class and collectively will count as 15% of your grade.

- You must submit them in class, in person—**absolutely no emailed or late critiques or those delivered by others will be accepted.**

### *Writing Drafts*

- In addition to participation in class discussions and writing critiques of written corporate communication tactics, you will be expected to complete public relations writing assignments related to the chapter of study for the week.
- All of these assignments will be based on the “client” you have been assigned—they should be consistent with the communication plan you will write for them (we will discuss this in detail after the clients visit class and before you begin writing drafts of tactics).
- Drafts of the 10 writing assignments will be discussed and critiqued in class, including a peer-edit from another student as well as one-one feedback from the professor. You then have until the next class period to turn in a final draft. You must be in class and participate meaningfully in draft sessions for your final copy to be accepted.
- In each case you will be asked to **write a cover memo** describing your strategy and rationale for the writing assignment—this is essential because in the work world you need to justify your thinking and ideas. You must apply principles discussed in class to explain your writing of each tactic. Each assignment is worth 10 points, and collectively account for 30% of your course grade.
- **ABSOLUTELY NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS ACCEPTED.** (See class calendar for schedule, deadlines).
- ***You may not turn in a final draft if you have not submitted a first draft for peer review.*** (Yes, that means a zero if you skip the peer review session or come without a draft).

### *Peer Reviews*

- Writing is learned by writing, but also by reviewing others’ writing. For each draft assignment, students will have their work reviewed in the Wednesday draft session by another student, using the peer review form.
- Students who turn in final drafts without a draft and review form will receive a zero.
- Students will also receive grades for their review of other students’ work. It must be thoughtful and thorough to receive full points and discuss details of writing, not just contents, layout and general points. Rationale should be given for positive and negative comments. (Use the form provided).
- Completing a substantive and thoughtful review each week of a fellow student’s work will count collectively as 15% of your grade.

### *Client Project*

- You must also complete writing assignments for a client who will be assigned by the professor. There will be more than one student working for each client, but *each student must do his/her own work*. The project counts as 40% of the grade.
- The client(s) will come to the class to explain their particular organization and corporate communication needs (*see class calendar*). It is vital that you are there to

listen and ask questions of the client to plan your work. You should also keep in touch with the client throughout the semester for additional research, information or instructions you need to complete writing assignments.

- All assignments are to be “real”; i.e., no made up names, situations etc. So you will need to start early and communicate with the client to get access to information, people to interview etc. The portfolio you turn in to the client (and professor) will be a selection of the draft tactics completed during the semester, which you will revise to be of professional quality following the graded draft with professor feedback earlier in the semester.

Your work for the client will consist of:

- a) Communications Audit report;
- b) Communications Plan, based on the audit;
- c) a portfolio of at least four different written public relations tools based on that plan—including position papers, ad copy, Web site content, direct mail package, speeches/presentations, newsletters, brochures, or annual report—and
- d) a cover memo explaining your strategy and rationale for your communication plan and the written tools.

The portfolio is due to the professor on the days we will present the portfolios to the clients, which will be at their workplace. It is advisable to start working on the client portfolio as soon as we have completed relevant class assignments (the draft tactics). Often, you will need to expand on what you did in the draft class assignment. You will make TWO copies of the client project—one the client gets to keep, and must include the “Client Feedback Form” (on Blackboard for you to download and give to the client) for them to return to the professor. The other copy will be returned to you with a grade at the final exam period.

**START WORKING ON THE CLIENT PROJECT EARLY!!!!**

## **Grading**

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Grades in this course will be determined on the following percentages:

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Critiques of example tactics | 15% |
| Weekly writing assignments   | 30% |
| Reviews of others’ work      | 15% |
| Client audit/plan/portfolio  | 40% |

Writing grades will be based on the following (10 pt scale for critiques, reviews, and weekly assignments; 100 pt scale for final project):

A (9-10) = excellent. Professional quality. Could be distributed to the public as is or with minor revisions.

B (7-8) = good. Good work but needs revisions to be ready for distribution.

C (5-6) = average. Bare minimum of effort evident. Errors. Lacks creativity. Needs significant rewrite.

D (3-4) = poor. Serious deficiencies in tone, style, grammar, strategy. Lacks complete information.

F (0-2) = unacceptable. Writing is difficult to understand or assess (see policy re: grammar below). Missed deadline.

\*Note grade of draft tactics includes a thorough cover memo as well.

## Class policies

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- Deadlines are to be met on time, just like the real world. If it's late it's a zero.
- It is expected that you will employ the skills you learned in earlier courses in the program (ie research abilities from CAP 115, design and technical skills from CAP 105). While the writing is the most important aspect of the grade, design and presentation should be completed in an appropriate software and meet basic quality standards for a mock-up of a design concept.
- All written assignments should be typed, stapled, and turned in on time, in hard copy in class. NO EMAILED ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.
- **Grammar will not be taught in this class but correct grammar will be expected. AFTER THREE GRAMMAR/SPELLING/PUNCTUATION ERRORS I STOP READING AND GIVE THE ASSIGNMENT A ZERO.** (A good reason to get "When Words Collide" as a suggestion)
- Reading assignments are to be completed prior to class (see calendar).
- Participation in class discussions is expected. That means offering your opinions and insights as well as LISTENING when others are sharing theirs. If you are caught on your phone or other electronic device you will be asked to leave.
- Plagiarism (presenting someone else's work as your own) is unacceptable. The penalty for plagiarism is an **automatic F in this course**. That includes copying and pasting existing client material in your own work. (See student code)
- Writing must all be your own work and not merely a cut and paste of client info into a new format (ie brochure copy on a web site). Obviously, key facts must remain intact, but your writing should be original.
- Understand the writing assignments. Do your research. Apply the principles of writing discussed in class. There is no excuse for not following basic instructions. If you don't understand something, ask the professor. Also keep in touch with the client for client assignments.
- Your writing will be evaluated based on meeting PR and organizational objectives, appropriate style/tone/voice for those objectives, AP style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, accuracy, clarity, and creativity (*see evaluation checklist on Blackboard*).

Course Calendar  
 CAP 423: Writing Corporate Communications  
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| <u>Date</u>   | <u>Topic</u>   | <u>Reading/Assignments*</u>                 |
|---|--|---|
| <b><i>*Additional readings are on BLACKBOARD—check each week in the “Supplemental Examples and Readings folder under “Course Documents”</i></b> |  |   |
| Jan 11  | Intro; Writing, Persuasion, Ethics   |   |
| Jan 13  | Persuasive, Attitudes, Action  | O’Keefe Chs 1-4                             |
| Jan 18  | <i>MLK Day—NO CLASS</i>  |   |
| Jan 20  | Persuasion Theories  | O’Keefe Chs 5-8                             |
| Jan 25  | Persuasion Effects and Factors   | O’Keefe Chs 9-12                            |
| Jan 27  | Clients in class; COM audits/plans   |   |
| Feb 1   | <i>Peer review Com Audit/Plan draft</i>  |   |
| Feb 3   | White papers; Position papers  | Wilcox p. 386 ( <i>Audit/Plan due</i> )     |
| Feb 8   | <i>Review position paper assignments</i>   |   |
| Feb 10  | Ad copy  | Wilcox Ch. 16 ( <i>Position paper due</i> ) |
| Feb 15  | <i>Review ad copy assignment</i>   |   |
| Feb 17  | Speeches, presentations  | Wilcox Ch. 15 ( <i>Ad due</i> )             |
| Feb 22  | <i>Review speech writing assignment</i>  |   |
| Feb 24  | Newsletters  | Wilcox Ch. 13 ( <i>Speech due</i> )         |
| Feb 29  | <i>Review newsletter assignments</i>   |   |
| Mar 2   | Brochures  | Wilcox Ch. 13 ( <i>Newsletter due</i> )     |
| SPRING BREAK (March 7-13)   |  |   |
| Mar 14  | <i>Review brochure assignment</i>  |   |
| Mar 16  | Direct mail  | Wilcox Ch. 16 ( <i>Brochure due</i> )       |
| Mar 21  | <i>Review direct mail assignments</i>  |   |
| Mar 23  | Web sites, blogs   | Wilcox Ch. 12 ( <i>DM due</i> )             |
| Mar 28  | <i>Review Web/blog/SM site assignments</i>   |   |
| Mar 30  | Social media   | Wilcox Ch. 12 ( <i>Web, blog due</i> )      |
| Apr 4   | <i>Review social media assignments</i>   |   |
| Apr 6   | Annual reports   | Wilcox p. 364-369 ( <i>SM due</i> )         |
| Apr 11  | <i>Review annual report assignment</i>   |   |
| Apr 13  | Oral presentations; discuss projects   | ( <i>Annual report due</i> )                |
| Apr 18  | <b>Client projects presented and turned in (at client workplace—TBD)</b>   |   |
| Apr 20  | <b>Client projects presented and turned in (at client workplace—TBD)</b>   |   |
| Apr 27  | Final Exam period is 4-5:50 pm. Graded client projects will be discussed and returned. YOU MUST BE PRESENT TO RECEIVE A GRADE. |   |