



Department of Journalism/Media Studies/Public Relations

GRADUATE STUDIES

**STRATEGIC WRITING FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS**

PR 263-A (CRN 97287)

Fall 2016

Mondays, 4:30-6:20 p.m.

Lawrence Herbert SOC, Room 117

Professor Jeff Morosoff

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Office Hours:

Tuesdays, 2:30-3:30 p.m.; Wednesdays, 1:15-2:15 p.m.;  
Thursdays, 2:00-3:30 p.m. For these and other time  
availability, please email me for an appointment.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a course in writing skills for persuasive communication for the public relations practitioner. As public relations continues to evolve from traditional, journalism-based practices to a complex profession requiring a broad range of writing and media skills for integrated marketing communication, this course will help to ensure that PR graduate students are well-versed in the differences and similarities within various communication formats and how to write for them.

From traditional press releases and brochures to the constantly evolving world of Internet-based communication, students will enhance their writing, verbal and presentation skills, and use critical thinking to find engaging and ethical techniques for targeting their messages to a variety of publics and media.

Students will review fundamentals of grammar and punctuation; examine the written tools of the public relations practitioner, survey computer software for writing and editing e-publications, examine techniques and current styles for blog and web site writing, and address the various challenges associated with writing for social media within a public relations campaign.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Students will review and evaluate their current skill set, and then enhance and expand their knowledge of traditional and online writing techniques.
- Students will review fundamentals of grammar and punctuation and work to eliminate common errors and relaxed writing habits.
- Students will identify and review the basic written tools of the public relations practitioner and examine how PR professionals are utilizing the established and evolving tools of the new media.

- Students will examine different strategic approaches as we emphasize the importance of effectively targeting an audience through appropriate medium.
- Students will survey the current computer software for writing and editing e-publications; examine the techniques and current styles for writing for web sites; and address the various challenges associated with writing for social media within a public relations campaign.
- Students will focus on PR writing for the print and electronic mass media, speechwriting, collateral material, web sites, blogs, podcasts, and social media platforms. Outside research, application of classroom knowledge for practical use, and independent and group projects will be assigned.
- Students will become better prepared for oral presentations and refine such skills through classroom practice and peer critique.
- Students will observe their own presentation skills through the use of video, and enhance their ability to address audiences, reporters, and other publics.

## GOALS

- Students will be given effective instruction in public relations communication as it pertains to the current environment within the practice.
- Students will understand the challenges of communicating for multiple mediums and be enabled to create content among the various forms of traditional and new media communications.
- Students will conduct significant exploration and research of web and social media content to discover and utilize new communications and public relations tools.
- Students will gain a heightened recognition that the convergence of print, broadcast and on-line communications greatly impacts professional public relations practices, and that knowledge of the changing PR environment is required to move messages through the modern media effectively.
- Students will develop and complete a course portfolio to demonstrate their command of language and usage of the learned tools.
- Students will refine their ability to communicate in front of audiences.
- Students will learn techniques for communicating in front of a camera, responding to reporters, and effectively relaying information.
- Students will use their attained knowledge to research and present and independent final project of their own choosing.

TEXTBOOK: Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques, 8th edition; Dennis L. Wilcox, Allyn & Bacon. Pearson, ISBN: 978-0-13-401049-6

REQUIRED READING: Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation; by Lynne Truss, Gotham Books, 2006

Associated Press Stylebook; Edited by Darrell Christian, ISBN-978-0-917360-54-1 or online at [www.apstylebook.com](http://www.apstylebook.com)

"Public Relations Nation" at <http://jmorosoff.wordpress.com> (see class requirements on page 4)

**RECOMMENDED READING:** You are urged to subscribe to and read these valuable online news services that will enhance your knowledge of current media events and public relations news. You are expected to keep up with web sites and trade publications for public relations professionals and journalists and the newspaper sections that deal particularly with business, media and advertising/public relations. These can include but are not limited to:

- MediaBistro.com
- bulldogreporter.com
- New York Times
- Newsday
- Wall Street Journal
- Columbia Journalism Review
- PR Tactics (PRSA)
- The Strategist

You may also wish to read:

Words That Work; by Dr. Frank Luntz, Hyperion Books, 2007

The Public Relations Writing Handbook; Merry Aronson, Don Spetner and Carol Ames, Jossey-Bass, ISBN-13: 978-0-7879-8631-5

Additional articles, blogs, web sites and podcasts may be assigned throughout the semester.

**SUPPLEMENTAL READING:** Publications may be held on reserve at the Axinn Library. Newsday and The New York Times, the Public Relations Society of America website (prsa.org), and other identified sources will be referenced throughout the semester. Hofstra's library has an online guide to public relations resources which you may find every helpful as you complete this and future PR courses:  
<http://libguides.hofstra.edu/content.php?pid=109224&sid=4225474>

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format; by Thomas H. Bivins, McGraw-Hill, 2008

The Public Relations Writer's Handbook: The Digital Age; by Merry Aronson, Don Spetner and Carol Ames, Jossey-Bass, 2007

Becoming a Public Relations Writer: A Writing Workbook for Emerging and Established Media; by Ronald D. Smith, Routledge, 2012

The PR Styleguide: Formats for Public Relations Practice; by Barbara Diggs-Brown, Wadsworth, 2012

Public Relations Writing: A Rhetorical Approach; by Michael L. Kent, Routledge, 2010

Public Relations Writing Worktext; by Joseph M. Zappala and Ann R. Carden, Routledge, 2010

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:** You're expected to attend and be on time for every class. Please contact me in advance of any absence or lateness; excessive absence and lateness will impact your success and grade in this class. Discussion, participation and a demonstrated understanding of writing skills learned will help determine final grades.

**READING:** Textbook and supplemental readings plus research will both prepare you for and assist you in the successful completion of assigned projects. Please read the textbook as assigned.

**ASSIGNMENT POLICIES:** There will be weekly assignments which will account for 35 percent of your final grade (see the list in the "Course Calendar").

- Assignments must be submitted on the due date and in class or WILL NOT be accepted. All assignments are due in the class session following the assignment.
- All assignments must be typed, double-spaced and stapled. Please put your name on the first page and number each page. Save your work until at least the end of the semester.
- In the public relations profession and in this class, correct grammar, punctuation and spelling are essential. Take steps to spell check, proofread and make your work as professional as possible.
- Sources, when required, should be noted in APA style. Here are sites for easy reference:

[http://www.vanguard.edu/faculty/ddegelman/index.aspx?doc\\_id=796](http://www.vanguard.edu/faculty/ddegelman/index.aspx?doc_id=796)

<http://www.crk.umn.edu/library/links/apa5th.htm>

**PERSONAL MEDIA:** Please be advised that I consider the use of personal electronic devices (cell phones, digital players, etc.) during class time to be inconsiderate of your classmates and me. If you must use your cellphone, please leave the classroom and then return. Laptops and notepads may be used for taking notes and research only.

**PRSSA:** For your own professional development, you are urged to attend meetings and join the Hofstra chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). The organization will be hosting a professional networking dinner on Thursday, November 3 and you are expected to attend. If you cannot attend due to a schedule conflict or the small registration fee, you will be required to complete a significant alternate assignment.

**PRSSA, PRSA, PRPLI AND RELATED EVENTS:** Meetings and professional development programs are held by the PRSSA twice a month during common hours, and are also staged by PRSA's New York City Chapter, the Public Relations Professionals of Long Island (PRPLI.org), and other related organizations. You'll be informed whenever there are opportunities to attend these professional development programs.

**"PUBLIC RELATIONS NATION":** You are required to subscribe to and comment weekly on my blog "Public Relations Nation" at <http://jmorosoff.wordpress.com> (published every Sunday morning; comments due before class the next day). You will lose a point from your final average for each missed blog comment.

EXAM: A take-home midterm worth 20 percent of your final grade will be given in class this semester. Make-up exams will be arranged only in emergency situations with prior approval.

FINAL PRESENTATION (PECHA KUCHA): Students will create and deliver a presentation in which 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each with an accompanying narration. This project is worth 10 percent of your final grade.

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| “PR NATION”:              | 15% |
| YOUR BLOG:                | 10% |
| ASSIGNMENTS:              | 35% |
| MIDTERM:                  | 20% |
| PECHA KUCHA PRESENTATION: | 20% |

GRADES: You are entitled to fairness, consistency and clarity. You’re far more likely to earn an A or A- when your work exceeds expectations. Work meeting basic competencies and expectations will most often receive grades in the B+ to B- range. Work that is either below par, omits some of the requirements or is late will usually earn a C+, C or C-. Students poorly executing and/or missing assignments may receive a D or F.

Please keep a folder of all your work and exams as a means to track and ensure accuracy on grading throughout the semester. You should also record your own attendance and lateness; both are part of the calculation of your final grade. I suggest that you schedule at least one office meeting with me to discuss your progress in this course.

While the final grade chart below reflects the possible letter grades you may earn, please note that I will usually omit the use of minuses (-) when grading your class work.

NUMBER/LETTER GRADE  
EQUIVALENTS:

|          |    |         |    |
|----------|----|---------|----|
| 100-94 = | A  | 78-75 = | C+ |
| 93-90 =  | A- | 74-71 = | C  |
| 89-85 =  | B+ | 70-69 = | C- |
| 84-81 =  | B  | 68-65 = | D  |
| 80-79 =  | B- | 0-64 =  | F  |

Incomplete Policy: Hofstra’s policies regarding Incomplete grades, default grades, and associated deadlines can be found in the Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Bulletins (<http://bulletin.hofstra.edu/>).

Academic Honesty:

Hofstra University Honor Code: “As a member of the Hofstra community I pledge to demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior in all aspects of my life, both inside and out of the classroom. I understand that I am accountable for everything I say and write. I will not misrepresent my academic work, nor will I give or receive unauthorized assistance for academic work. I agree to respect the rights of all members of the Hofstra community. I will be guided by the values expressed in the P.R.I.D.E Principles. I accept the responsibility to follow this Honor Code at all times.”

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious ethical and professional infractions. For information regarding Hofstra's statement of principles with respect to academic honesty, examples of violations, procedures for handling violations, as well as a student's right to appeal a charge, see Faculty Policy Series #11 for undergraduate students ([http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate\\_FPS\\_11.pdf](http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate_FPS_11.pdf)) and Faculty Policy Series #11G for graduate students ([http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate\\_FPS\\_11G.pdf](http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate_FPS_11G.pdf)).

Student Access Services (SAS):

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability, please contact for Student Access Services (SAS). In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, qualified individuals with disabilities will not be discriminated against in any programs, or services available at Hofstra University.

Individuals with disabilities are entitled to accommodations designed to facilitate full access to all programs and services. SAS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will provide students with documented disabilities accommodation letters, as appropriate.

Please note that accommodations may require early planning and are not retroactive; please contact SSD as soon as possible. All students are responsible for providing accommodation letters to each instructor and for discussing with him or her the specific accommodations needed and how they can be best implemented in each course. For more information on services provided by the university and for submission of documentation, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities, 107 Student Center, 516-463-7075

Student Policy Prohibiting Discriminatory Harassment, Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct

Hofstra prohibits sexual and other discriminatory harassment, stalking, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and other sexual misconduct (collectively, "Gender Based Offenses"). If you or someone you know believes they have been subjected to any of these Gender Based Offenses, help is available. To make a report, or for more information about Hofstra's Student Policy Prohibiting Discriminatory Harassment, Relationship Violence, and Sexual Misconduct (available at <http://hofstra.edu/sexualmisconduct>), please contact the Title IX Coordinator at (516) 463-5841 or [TitleIXCoordinator@hofstra.edu](mailto:TitleIXCoordinator@hofstra.edu), or Public Safety at (516) 463-6606. Confidential resources and support are also available from clinicians in Student Counseling Services (516-463-6791), medical professionals at the Health and Wellness Center (516-463-6745), and clergy in the Interfaith Center.

Absences for Religious Observance

Hofstra University recognizes that students and/or faculty may from time to time miss class due to religious observances. Students who anticipate missing class for this reason should notify faculty members in advance. Likewise, faculty members who anticipate missing class for religious observance should notify students in their classes.

As stated in the Faculty Policy Series, "No student shall be expelled or refused admission to Hofstra University because he or she is unable to participate in any examination, study or work requirement because of his or her religious obligations and practices. However, all students are expected to complete all assignments and examinations. It is understood that no adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student who avails him or herself of religious observances. The University, faculty, and student shall work together to achieve a reasonable accommodation concerning any conflicts between educational and religious obligations."

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## COURSE CALENDAR (subject to change)

IMPORTANT ASSIGNMENT NOTE: You must comment on “Public Relations Nation” weekly, whether class is being held that week or not. Your comments are due each Monday before 4:30 p.m.

### Week 1/ SEPTEMBER 12

Synopsis: The session will compare and contrast traditional and current on-line PR-generated content and the variety of writing techniques involved in creating content effectively. We will review the standards of punctuation, grammar and style as outlined within the Associated Press Stylebook and other sources.

Reading: Chapters 1 and 2; Acquire and begin reading Eats, Shoots and Leaves.

Assignment (6 points): Write a 2-3 page review of Eats, Shoots and Leaves, highlighting what you’ve learned from the book and its most memorable passages (due 10/10)

### Week 2/ SEPTEMBER 19: Review of writing basics, blogging

Synopsis: We will review passive vs. active voice, and examine techniques for “tighter” writing. We will explore common writing errors and methods for improving and enhancing your writing. You will learn how to create a blog using WordPress.

Reading: Chapter 3

Assignment (3 points): Complete question handout #1 (due 10/3). Develop your personal blog and your first post (you must post at least four times during the semester). Send your link to [jeffrey.morosoff@hofstra.edu](mailto:jeffrey.morosoff@hofstra.edu) (due 9/26).

### Week 3/ OCTOBER 3: Writing tighter

Synopsis: This session will focus on editing and providing as much information as possible using the fewest words necessary. Students will practice editing content for readability, effectiveness and economy of words. Headline content will also be explored.

Reading: Chapter 4

Assignment (3 points): Complete question handout #2 (due 10/10).



Week 4 / OCTOBER 10: Writing stories

Synopsis: Eats, Shoots and Leaves review is due. Students will discuss the fundamentals of good storytelling, using human interest to influence and inform target audiences.

Reading: Chapters 5 and 6

Assignment: Write and post copy to your blog (due 10/17).

Week 5 / OCTOBER 24: Written products of the PR practitioner, Part I

Synopsis: The first of this two-part module will review the writing fundamentals for press releases, photo releases, media advisories, backgrounders, fact sheets, and pitch letters, and address how they are distributed.

Reading: Chapter 12

Assignment (9 points): Write an imaginative and action-inspiring backgrounder, press release, and pitch letter. Each should be a single page. (due 10/31)

Week 6 / OCTOBER 31: Written products of the PR practitioner, Part II

Synopsis: This session will focus on collateral materials, the standard print products of nearly every organization, including: brochures, newsletters, guidebooks, annual reports, etc. You will explore the writing styles that make effective mission statements and organizational images, and the importance of using these tools for marketing and branding.

Assignment (4 points): Write and design a three-fold organizational brochure (due 11/7; you may refer to the textbook for some guidance but please review other online examples.)

Reading: Chapter 14

Week 7 / NOVEMBER 7: Speech writing and presentation, Pecha Kucha

Synopsis: You will learn the mechanics and construction of a good speech including the outline, text body, introductions, transitions, and conclusions. We will view video of renowned speeches. We will review fundamental presentation skills and how to craft an “elevator speech.” We will also look at Pecha Kucha, a presentation style in which 20 slides are shown and narrated for 20 seconds each.

Assignment (8 points): Pick an issue of personal interest and write a five (5) minute speech (details and requirements to be provided in class). Prepare to deliver the speech in class on 11/14.

Week 8 / NOVEMBER 14: Your speech

Synopsis: You will deliver your five (5) minute speech, critique classmates' speeches, and suggest improvements.

Assignment: TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM (10 points; due Monday, 11/21 in class). Write and post copy to your blog (due 11/21).

Reading: Chapters 8 and 9

Week 9 / NOVEMBER 21: Writing for the traditional electronic media

Synopsis: This session will examine the traditional structure for writing for radio and television. Formats for scriptwriting and copywriting will be reviewed; we will observe public service announcement content.

Assignment (6 points): Draft a 30-second public service announcement for both radio and television promoting the same subject matter. The television script must include both action and dialogue; the radio script must feature different copy than that of the TV script (due 11/28).

Reading: Chapters 10 and 11

Week 10 / NOVEMBER 28: Writing for the Internet

Synopsis: You will review best practices for writing content for web sites and social media platforms, and examine the leading web and social media sites. You will learn how messages can be tailored to the sites' strengths and limitations. Students will practice writing effective posts and tweets.

Assignment: Prepare a final project proposal (details to be provided in class).

Reading: Chapter 17

Week 11 / DECEMBER 5: Writing legally

Synopsis: This session will review legal issues associated with writing content for print, electronic and social media including privacy, copyrights and trademarks, plagiarism, and working with regulatory agencies and lawyers.

Assignment (5 points): Complete question handout #3 (due 12/12) Write and post copy to your blog (due 12/12).

Text reading: Chapter 13

Week 12 / DECEMBER 12: Writing for business, Part I

Synopsis: This session will focus on writing skills required to communicate in a business environment, i.e. email, memorandums, letters, and proposals. Tone and approach will be examined.

Assignment (4 points): Complete question handout #4 (due 12/13). Comment on “Public Relations Nation.”

Week 13 / DECEMBER 13: Writing and speaking for business, Part II

Synopsis: This session will focus on writing skills required to communicate using traditional, desktop and online presentation tools.

Week 14 / DECEMBER 19: Pecha Kucha presentations