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COMX 352.50: Public Relations Portfolio

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COMX 352-50 PUBLIC RELATIONS PORTFOLIO

Spring 2022 Syllabus

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

Our focus in this class is to move beyond a simple understanding of the role of a public relations practitioner to how to do the work required of a public relations practitioner. The bulk of this work involves writing—in a number of formats and for a number of audiences. We will explore the process of writing, practice writing different public relations documents, and investigate the process necessary to understand which public relations documents to use in which situations. At the end of this course, you will produce an Information Kit that will showcase the types of writing we will work on throughout the course. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Understand the role of an ethical public relations practitioner in the 21st century
- Comprehend the scope of activities necessary for successful public relations
- Craft a variety of written messages
- Plan out which written messages are necessary given specific contextual factors
- Feel confident in writing clean, coherent, concise messages

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts:

Smith, R. D. (2020). *Becoming a public relations writer*. (6th ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Associated Press (2020). *The Associated Press stylebook and briefing on media law 2018* (55th ed.). New York: Basic Books.

ADDITIONAL READINGS ONLINE

Note: This class is an upper level class, and not a “fundamentals” of writing class. Due to the writing intensive nature of COMX 352, you should not enroll in this class until you have passed WRIT 101 or its equivalent and had at least one additional writing course with a C or better. You’ll have a hard time getting a lot out of this class without a solid foundation in basic grammar and English composition.

COURSE FORMAT

The course objectives are met entirely online, in which most of you will now be pros! This is an opportunity for you to interpret and internalize information on your own time, and in a space that is comfortable for you. By removing many of the constraints of time and location, this course has the potential to fit your unique needs in a way that many traditional courses are not equipped to. Over the course of this class, students will read the text, interpret and analyze the text through forum questions, visit websites, write papers, observe interactions, and more.

I have found the more contact students make (both with their peers and with their instructors) the more successful they are in an online course. Thus, I encourage you to interact and to engage as fully as possible.

Your success in this class is also dependent on reading all course materials and instructions thoroughly. I strongly urge you to avoid procrastinating the readings until the end of the week, as your assignments and forum responses are based on information you will get from the readings.

Please note that while we will probably not meet face to face, I aim to be accessible to my students, no matter the format. I check my email most days and I'm available by phone as well. Or, if you have a quick question or want to point out that you sent me an email to which you just need a quick response, feel free to text me. And, although I don't hold office hours on campus even when we're not in a pandemic, I am always willing to meet with you by zoom.

POLICIES

Deadlines: Although many of the constraints of time have been released for you in this course, deadlines are still inevitable. To keep you caught up in the course there are deadlines by which each assignment must be completed. Assignments may always be completed earlier than the deadline, but **any assignment not uploaded to the website by 11:55 p.m. (Mountain Time) on the date due will not be accepted (the one exception is you are allowed ONE Get out of Jail, which is addressed later in the syllabus).**

Ethics: Many courses in higher education just leave ethics as a footnote, and assume a thorough discussion of the subject is unnecessary as the topic is self-explanatory. As a Public Relations Practitioner, I believe it is not a footnote, but a core thread running through everything we do. That said, I expect you to display integrity in your academic pursuits, and submit original work.

Academic Integrity: All students taking this course must adhere to the University of Montana's academic dishonesty policy as presented in the Student Conduct Code (SCC). As noted in the code, students are expected to practice academic honesty. Any actions including, but not limited to, the following behaviors are reasons for pursuing academic and university sanctions: plagiarism, copying another student's exam, allowing another student to copy from your exam or work, sharing information with another student during testing sessions, acquiring or possessing an exam without the instructor's permission, tampering with course materials or resources (including library references) submitting false information (data, quotations, citations, etc.), representing someone else's work as your own, etc. I have an excellent reputation for busting cheaters; if you engage in any act of academic misconduct, you will be caught and punished. The first time I catch you, you will receive a zero for the assignment. If I catch you again, you will fail the class—no questions asked—and steps will be taken to initiate University sanctions, as provided for in the SCC. You are responsible for reading and understanding this code; if you have any questions, please contact me or the department chair. The SCC can be viewed at http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php. Bottom line: don't do it. There are plenty of other rule-breaking activities you can engage in while at college which have less serious consequences and are a lot more fun.

Original Work: I expect all the work you do in this class to be completely original. No work that has been done by classmates (current or previous) may be used by you, in whole or in part, for your work in this class. No work that you have done (for any other course or in this course if you have taken it previously) may be submitted to fulfill the assignments in this class. Finally, absolutely no plagiarism (from the web, from organizations, from any other source) will be tolerated—be sure everything you write in this class is completely your own creation. It is expected that you will use outside sources for

reference for some or all of your assignments. Regardless of whether you paraphrase or use passages verbatim, you MUST cite your sources using APA format. There is one notable exceptions to this rule; anything falling outside of this exception MUST be completely original or properly cited:

- You may use the mission statement for your organization verbatim without attribution in your backgrounder assignment only.

Types of Plagiarism: The Internet has made plagiarizing much simpler. However, keep in mind that if you can find something on the Internet, I can, too. Generally, plagiarism occurs in three forms:

1. *Incremental:* Failure to properly attribute source material (e.g., using a quote or statistic and failing to attribute it to the author)
2. *Patchwork:* Copying and pasting material from one or more sources with very little modification (e.g., visiting three web sites and cutting and pasting snippets from each)
3. *Global:* Taking the full text of another source and passing it off as your own work

How to Avoid Plagiarism: Surprisingly, it's pretty easy to catch plagiarism. In most cases, the material is cut and pasted from the Internet. All I have to do is run a keyword search, and nine times out of ten, I find the source material in its entirety in under a minute. So avoid the temptation of plagiarizing by getting started on the assignments early, and follow the guidelines below:

1. *Fulfill the specific requirements of the assignments.* The most obvious sign of plagiarism is that it doesn't really do what the assignment asked you to do.
2. *Plan ahead.* Remove the temptation to plagiarize by knowing the assignments and planning ahead.
3. *Research first, write your assignment, then add sources.* Do all of your research before you write. Give the information time to digest and gel in your mind. Then, after you've made sense of it, start writing. This technique helps you paraphrase information rather than just cutting and pasting it. The result is an assignment that is "yours," not merely a patchwork of other people's words.
4. *Discuss your assignment with me ahead of time.* Show me the sources you are using, and discuss the appropriate manner of citation needed for your sources.
5. *When in doubt, ask.* I would far rather spend a few minutes clarifying an academic integrity question for you than to have you take the risk of engaging in academic dishonesty and spending those same few minutes disciplining you. Taking a few minutes to call or shoot me an email can save us both a hassle!

Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitations Act of 1973 states that if you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a coordinator in the Office of Disability Affairs so accommodations can be arranged. After you receive the accommodation letters, **please contact me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations.**

Technology: A known fact of technology is it sometimes fails. Computers crash, printers run out of ink, Internet connections falter. In order to control for these failures, since the Internet is your only link to the class, your guiding principles should be to think ahead and be prepared. Save your work often, and in several places. Leave yourself time before assignments are due to allow for connection errors, and familiarize yourself with communication resources in your area in case you need to use them as a back-up to complete your assignments.

The only acceptable technology-related excuse for not meeting the requirements of this course is a documented failure of the UM Moodle system—if you find the system is not working, you'll need to email me immediately to inform me of the time at which you believe the system (not your computer or connection)

was at fault. You should then contact the help desk at CIS (Help Desk: 406-243-4357, helpdesk@umontana.edu). You should also continue attempting to access the system—any failures in the system are usually resolved within an hour. If documented failures of the system occurred when an assignment was due, you will not be docked late points, but I expect you to try to get an assignment in as soon as the system is up again.

Consideration: The overall atmosphere in the class should be that of respect—for yourself and everyone else in the class. Help foster an atmosphere where a priority for education and a respect for all students is valued by engaging in comments that relate to course content and show tolerance for opinions different from your own. Please understand that whether it is a face-to-face or online environment, harassment of any kind is both inappropriate and intolerable, and disciplinary action will be taken should it occur.

Contesting Grades: I am willing to go over any assignment or quiz with you to discuss your concerns. This is more difficult in an online context than in-person, so we'll have to work with what we've got. When you contact me, please write down your specific concerns and your backing for these concerns, and I will research your situation. We'll take it from there should further discussion need to occur.

GRADING

This course will be graded with traditional letter grades. Your assignments will be returned and grades will be recorded in Moodle within one week of the due date, so you will always have a real-time view of your course standing.

Online Profile	0 points		
Syllabus Quiz	10 points	500-485 points=A+	399-385 points=C+
AP Style Quiz	15 points	484-465 points=A	384-365 points=C
End of Term Quiz	50 points	464-450 points=A-	364-350 points=C-
Backgrounder	50 points	449-435 points=B+	349-335 points=D+
News Release	50 points	434-415 points=B	334-315 points=D
Organizational Feature	50 points	414-400 points=B-	314-300 points=D-
Position Statement	50 points		<300 points=F
Brochure Copy	50 points		
Brochure Layout	25 points		
Information Kit	100 points		
Forum Postings (5@5)	30 points		
Forum Responses (4@5)	20 points		
Total Points:	500 points		

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins on all sides of each page. All assignments MUST be spell checked and grammar checked. This is a writing class, and my standards are high. My intent is not to be punitive, but for you to become a better writer by the end of the semester. Specific directions for each assignment will be posted on our course website on Moodle.

Online Profile: Since we only interact online, it's nice to be able to put a face to a name and know a bit about you. You'll find the profile in the right sidebar under the maroon "Administration" heading. Complete the profile by uploading a picture of yourself, telling us your major, from where you're taking the class and your

hobbies. You only have to complete this profile once and it will appear in any online course you're taking. This is required, not just a suggestion!

AP Style Quiz: I've designed this course to prepare you for an entry-level PR position. It's very writing intensive, and I hold you to the standards of the profession. One of those standards is following Associated Press (AP) style. Reporters, editors and others use the *AP Stylebook* as a guide for grammar, punctuation and principles and practices of reporting. The *AP Stylebook* is considered a newspaper industry standard and is also used by broadcasters, magazines and public relations firms. It includes an A-to-Z listing of guides to capitalization, abbreviation, spelling, numerals and usage. I expect you to follow AP style, so this quiz is designed to familiarize you with the types of things in the *AP Stylebook* and how to find them.

Writing Assignments: This is a writing course, and you will be spending a great deal of time writing. You will complete five writing assignments over the course of the semester. Some are easier to complete than others, so make sure you look ahead and stay on top of the work you need to do. These writing assignments will become part of the Information Kit you produce as your final for the course. **All writing assignments will be based on the organization you select in Week 2.**

Information Kit: This course will culminate in the creation of an Information Kit that will include a cover letter, a backgrounder, a news release, an organizational feature, a position statement, and a brochure. Since the materials required in the final information kit will be pieces you have already written, it gives you an opportunity to revise and improve upon what you've already produced.

Get Out of Jail Free: You'll notice in the online grade book the very first "assignment" is called "Get Out of Jail Free," and it's worth 10 extra credit points. Sometimes you score a quick getaway that would interfere with your ability to meet the deadline; sometimes you upload the wrong file (or upload it incorrectly!); sometimes you just forget. I give each student an opportunity to miss one deadline with no penalty each semester. If you miss a deadline, I'll still accept your work but you'll forfeit the extra credit points; if you never use your Get Out of Jail Free card, it's worth 10 extra credit points to you at the semester's end. The caveat is you must submit your assignment within one week of the deadline. That means I need to receive your assignment by no later than 11:55 p.m. the Sunday following the original deadline. (See Submitting Work section below for how to submit.)

Forum Postings: Some weeks you will have the opportunity to participate in a forum. *Think of the forum questions as a way to demonstrate your comprehension of the course material by integrating the textbook and course notes to explain your opinions and apply what we're learning in class to what you're experiencing and observing in the real world.*

Forum Postings are available until 11:55 p.m. on the day they are due. Students learn most when they engage not only with the course content, but also with one another. Thus, I take engaging in discussion very seriously. **If you miss participating in a forum, you are not able to make it up.** Each post is worth a maximum of 5 points; you are expected to post your own response to the question AND respond to at least one peer's post each week, for a total of 10 points per forum. (There are two exceptions to this—the forum in Week 1 and Week 4 do not require a peer response.) The following table represents the ways in which students earn grades for their weekly forum postings:

"A" Posting (5 points): ▪ The posting provides very detailed answering of the weekly question, and comprises roughly 250-300 words of text. ▪ The post includes proper APA citation (Author, date, p.) of the course textbook or outside materials.	"A" Response (5 points): ▪ The response provides very detailed reply, raising issues and/or concerns with the original post, or illuminating your agreement with the post and the rationale behind your stance. ▪ The response indicates a great understanding of your classmates' posting, and your response is
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▪ The post indicates a great understanding of the concept, and the response is well thought-out and intriguing.	▪ well thought-out and intriguing. ▪ The response is free of any technical writing errors.
“B” Posting (4 points): ▪ The posting provides a detailed answering of the weekly question, and comprises 200-250 words of text. ▪ The post includes proper APA citation (Author, date, p.) of the course textbook or outside materials. ▪ The post indicates an acceptable understanding of the concept, but could be more nuanced. ▪ Technical writing errors are minimal.	“B” Response (4 points): ▪ The response provides a moderately detailed reply, raising issues and/or concerns with the original post, or illuminating your agreement with the post and the rationale behind your stance. ▪ The response is well thought-out and intriguing. ▪ Technical writing errors are minimal.
“C” Posting (3 points): ▪ The posting provides a hasty answer to the weekly question, comprising between 100-200 words of text. ▪ The post includes citation of the course textbook or outside materials, but it is not in APA format or does not contain the full citation (Author, date, p.). ▪ The post indicates vague understanding of the concept. ▪ Technical writing errors are minimal.	“C” Response (3 points): ▪ The response lacks detail, only vaguely raising issues and/or concerns with the original post, or illuminating your agreement with the post and the rationale behind your stance. ▪ Technical writing errors are minimal.
“D” Posting (2 points): ▪ The posting provides a hasty answer to the weekly question, comprising between 75-100 words of text. ▪ The post includes no citations. ▪ The post indicates vague understanding of the concept. ▪ Technical writing errors are very distracting.	“D” Response (2 points): ▪ The response is hasty and lacks detail, and does not include specific reasons for your agreement or rebuttal of your classmates’ stance. ▪ Technical writing errors are very distracting.
“F” Posting (1 point): ▪ The posting provides little to no answer to the weekly question, comprising less than 75 words of text. ▪ The post includes no citations. ▪ Technical writing errors are egregious to the point of being unreadable.	“F” Response (1 point): ▪ The response provides little information. ▪ Technical writing errors are egregious to the point of being unreadable.

SUBMITTING WORK

Please save all work in a Microsoft Word file (with the exception of the Brochure Layout Assignment and your final assignment). You are responsible for making sure the assignment you send is correctly uploaded and readable to me, before the due date. This requires some double-checking on your part, but is necessary. If I can’t open your assignment, I can’t grade it.

Your assignment files should be named in the following format, so it’s clear to me what you are submitting:

Last name, First name Assignment name

EXAMPLE:

Beighle, Lucy News Release.docx

Also, please be sure that in the text of any assignment you include a header with your full name. **Please do not submit assignments through e-mail**—Moodle and the forum are the only places I will accept assignments. The exception to this is when you submit an assignment using your Get Out of Jail free card. That should be submitted through email with “Get Out of Jail” AND the title of the assignment in the subject line.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK	TOPIC/READING	ASSIGNMENT	DUE
1	What is Public Relations? • Gale 2007 • Murphy 2004 • USC Annenberg Report 2012 • What is Public Relations Notes	• Respond to Forum Question • Syllabus Quiz	1/23
2	Effective Writing/The Writing Process • Chapter 2: Effective Writing • Chapter 4: The Writing Process • Lamott 1995 • The Writing Process Notes • Writing Peccadilloes	• Respond to Forum Question • AP Style Quiz	1/30
3	Persuasive and Ethical Communication/Writing and What it Means to You • Chapter 1: Writing and What it Means to You • Chapter 3: Persuasive and Ethical Communication • Persuasive and Ethical Comm. Notes	• Backgrounder	2/6
4	News/News Writing Style • Chapter 5: News: The Basis for All Strategic Writing • Chapter 6: News Writing Style	• Respond to Forum Question	2/13
5	Paid, Earned, Owned and Shared Media/Print News Releases • Part 2 pages 137-141 • Chapter 9: Fact Sheet and Advisory • Chapter 10: Print News Releases • News and the PR Writer Notes	• News Release	2/20
6	Social Media and Wiki • Chapter 7: Social Media and Wiki	• Respond to Forum Question	2/27
7	Organizational Features • Chapter 14: News Features • Levy 2002 • Organizational Features Notes	• Organizational Feature	3/6
8	Newsletters and Corporate Reports • Chapter 15: Brochure, Newsletters and Corporate Reports • Newsletters and Corporate Reports Notes	• Respond to Forum Question	3/13
9	Advocacy and Opinion • Chapter 13: Advocacy and Opinion • Advocacy and Opinion Notes	• Letter to the Editor	3/20
10	Website and Blog • Chapter 14: Website and Blog • The SPIN Project	• Respond to Forum Question	4/3

11	Transmedia News Package • Chapter 12: Transmedia News Package • Kappel 2003 • Fliers and Brochures Notes	• Brochure Copy	4/10
12	Broadcast News Release • Chapter 11: Broadcast News Release • Farsetta and Price 2006 • Broadcast News Release Notes	• Brochure Layout	4/17
13	Donor Appeal • Chapter 16: Donor Appeal	• Redo Assignment (optional) • Quiz	4/24
14	Public Relations Advertising/Speechwriting • Chapter 17: Speech, Presentation and Interview • Chapter 18: Public Relations Advertising	• Respond to Forum Question	5/1
15	Information Kits • Information Kit FAQ's • Information Kits Notes	• Information Kit NO FINAL EXAM	5/8

COMMUNICATION

The instructions and information you'll need for this class are contained in this Syllabus and on the front page each week in Moodle. I reserve the right to continue to add information and notes to future weeks (so although you're welcome to view them and know that the "bones" and assignments of the week will stay the same, I may be adding notes, readings or a quiz or two, just like if I were preparing for a "live" lecture each week.

BUT, if I need to communicate something to you about a topic relevant to the current week, I will add it to the front page of the week, but I will also email you all that there is new information. Make sense? For example, if we're in Week 2, and I decide that based on quiz results you need more information on using your Stylebook, I will add it to the Week 2 front page and email you all that I have done so. If we're in Week 2 and I need to add information to Week 3, I will just add it, no other notification.

That said, I expect you to check your university email daily. You're online already, right? It just takes a minute. I also expect you to read all of information very thoroughly each week. The links to quizzes, additional readings, assignments and forums are all imbedded in the text.

Again, welcome to Public Relations Portfolio!

Lucy

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