

# COM 308 – Public Relations Writing

Spring 2007 - #2579

Tuesday & Thursday 1:40-3:30 p.m.

Bishop 32

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**Office Hours:** M & W 8:45 – 9:30 a.m., T & Th 3:30-4:30 p.m. or by appointment

**Course Description:** Students will learn basic research principles associated with public relations writing and prepare an assortment of public relations documents and tools including news releases, fact sheets, fliers, brochures, position statements, Web pages, and appeal letters as well as resumes. The class will culminate in the development of a portfolio of work. Use of the *AP Stylebook* is reinforced.

**Prerequisites:** COM 301 and either COM 210 or ENG 191; or permission of instructor

## Required Textbooks:

- Ronald D. Smith (2003). *Becoming a Public Relations Writer* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)
  - *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* (2002 edition)
- 📌 **Note: Please bring the Smith textbook to every class.**

## Recommended, Supplemental Textbooks:

- Any book of grammar and usage, such as Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*
- A dictionary

**Purpose:** Public relations writing has been described as a process that is 90 percent thought and 10 percent writing. It encompasses diverse styles, linked by their common purpose of advocacy for a client or organization. This course is intended to provide opportunities, in a service learning setting, to develop not only writing skills but also insights into public relations management so as to make appropriate decisions among various publics, writing objectives, message strategies, and media opportunities. The course's primary goal is to have each student demonstrate patterns of planning which lead to effective public relations writing for an actual community-based client.

**Course Objectives:** Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

- Use a planning process before writing in any format
- Apply the techniques of persuasive writing toward various ends
- Use the methods of research for public relations writing
- Show an understanding of writing for non-public media
- Write for various print and electronic media formats
- Master the process of writing effective news releases
- Demonstrate an understanding of community-building on Buffalo's West Side or other neighborhoods in Western New York through work with a community client

Methods and activities for instruction will include lectures, class assignments, in-class practice, class discussion, and meetings outside the classroom with a community client.

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## GRADE ASSIGNMENT

The final grade will be calculated according to the following formula:

- **Writing Assignments: 40%**

In-class and out-of-class writing assignments will comprise the bulk of the daily work for this class. Most of these assignments will be graded; several others will simply be marked as complete or incomplete. The lowest grade will be dropped before averaging your final grade in this area. Points will be deducted for misuse of grammar and incorrect format, punctuation, and spelling.

  - ✚ **Reflection Papers:** Three reflection papers (two pages each, double-spaced) describing your thoughts about your service learning project will be assigned. The first, describing your client and your initial meeting with the client organization, is due **Feb. 8**; the second, your mid-semester thoughts about your ongoing relationship with your client is due **March 27**; and the third, summarizing what you learned through your service learning project about public relations writing, is due along with your portfolio on **May 1**.
- **Exams: 25%**

Instead of a comprehensive final exam, this course will include several exams given in class or as take-home projects. The in-class exams will be based on the textbook and material presented in class. The course also will include a stylebook exam (based on the *AP Stylebook*) and an editing exam; since public relations writing requires the highest standards of written expression, these exams will help you identify your strengths and begin to overcome any problem areas in your writing.
- **Final Portfolio for Community Client: 25%**

Students often find that a portfolio of their best writing is very helpful in interviews for internships or jobs. For this project, each student will choose a community organization from the list provided by the professor as the basis for a portfolio of selected writing samples. These samples will include:

  1. Your resume
  2. Fact sheet for an event
  3. News release: general print media
  4. News release: localized print media
  5. News release: radio release with actuality
  6. News advisory *or* story idea memo
  7. Biography, Q&A, or organizational history
  8. Position statement *or* op-ed commentary
  9. Brochure
  10. Web page
  11. Appeal letter with response device and follow-up letter
  12. Script for television public service announcement or commercial advertisement

13. Two-page reflection paper – describing your thoughts about your service learning project for the community client. How did your thoughts change during the semester? What did you learn by doing a service learning public relations writing project? What challenges and opportunities did this project present?
14. Up to three optional, extra-credit item(s) such as photo caption, pitch letter, or flier

**Note: All items except the resume require a planning sheet.**

- **Class Participation: 10%**

The class participation grade will include attendance, assignments completed in class, and your participation in discussions about assigned readings and public relations. Attendance will be taken. Missing more than four classes means you miss more than 15 percent of the semester, which will prevent you from getting higher than a C grade for this course. Be actively involved in this class! Take careful notes, participate in discussions and small group work, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

Your final grade will be based on your composite average.

A	94-100	C	74-77
A-	90-93	C-	70-73
B+	88-89	D+	68-69
B	84-87	D	64-67
B-	80-83	D-	60-63
C+	78-79	E (fail)	Below 60

**Incompletes.** In order to receive an incomplete grade for the course, students must be passing the course at the time of their crisis, must have completed most of the coursework, and provide a valid medical or legal reason that has been accepted by the Communication Department chair.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS

As a student in COM 308, you will be treated as you can expect to be treated in the workplace; that is, as an adult professional responsible for your own performance.

**Attendance and Punctuality:** As a public relations practitioner, you will be expected to arrive at work on time every day, ready to do your job. As a student, you are expected to come to every scheduled class meeting on time and be prepared to participate. Repeated late arrival negatively impacts on the entire class; repeated late arrival and/or missing more than four classes will result in a lower grade for the course. If you are absent for any reason, it is your responsibility to obtain class notes, possible assignment changes and/or handouts from another student. If I find it necessary to cancel class due to illness or weather conditions, I will send an e-mail to all students that day and will have a note posted on the classroom door. Also check Buffalo State

College's web site and consult local radio and TV stations for college-wide closings due to inclement weather.

**Participation:** In the workplace, participation involves more than mere physical presence. Likewise, in the classroom, you are expected to be actively involved. Take the initiative in discussion and projects, ask relevant questions, and contribute to the overall learning environment of this class. Participation also requires your attention. All cell phones, electronic devices, etc., must be turned off and placed out of view during class. Please see me to discuss any necessary exceptions to this requirement. *Use of the computers is restricted to in-class work except before or after class or during the break.*

**Assignments:** It is imperative that all assignments be handed in on the day that they are due. Assignments that are turned in one class late will have ten points deducted. Assignments that are turned in two classes after deadline will have an additional ten points deducted. *Assignments that are more than two classes late will not be accepted and will receive a grade of zero.* If you cannot attend class, please make arrangements to have your assignments delivered to class for you. If you must miss a test, you must contact me in advance, or no makeup will be given. Students requesting a makeup test or an incomplete will be asked to provide documentation. Remember, deadlines are part of the public relations profession.

**Academic Integrity:** Each student is expected to make an honest effort in this class and to be scrupulous in maintaining academic integrity. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated, and college guidelines on academic misconduct will be enforced. For more information, see "Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism" at <http://www.buffalostate.edu/library/research/plagiarism.asp>.

**Disruptive Behavior:** Disruptive behavior by students will not be tolerated. If a student behaves in a disruptive or threatening manner, I will exercise my right to ask that individual to leave the classroom. If refused, I will exercise my right to notify the University Police. The responding officer will determine whether an arrest should be made or whether a referral to medical or counseling staff is appropriate. If a student is perceived as a danger to himself/herself or others, the Dean of Students may propose an interim suspension until a hearing is held. Any student removed from class will have a right to a hearing.

**Students with Disabilities or Special Needs:** Students with disabilities or special needs should contact the Office of Disability Services (878-4500). Based on recommendations from that office, students may receive needed assistance, such as additional time or a quiet space to take exams, a reader for exams, etc.

**Writing Standards:** Because of the professional nature of this class, standards of grammar, punctuation and spelling will be expected in every writing sample the student submits. Neatness, conformity to the *Associated Press Stylebook*, and a professional look also are expected. All writing assignments must be typed and proofread.

## COM 308 Class Schedule – Spring 2007

1. Jan. 23 – **Intro; Writing Relationships**

2. Jan. 25 – **Standard Usage; Simple Language**

Come to class having read all of Chapter 1 & Chapter 2, pp. 12-25

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3. Jan. 30 – **Meet the Community Clients**

4. Feb. 1 – **Meaningful and Nonbiased Language**

Read Chapter 2, pp. 26-41

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5. Feb. 6 – **Communication Theory & Persuasion**

Read Chapter 3

**Homework due in this class:** 3.3 & 3.4 Sheriff

6. Feb. 8 – **Writing Process**

Read Chapter 4

**Due:** Reflection Paper #1

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7. Feb. 13 – **Planning; Research**

**Due:** 4.2/Objectives & 4.3/Planning Sheet

8. Feb. 15 – **News**

Read Chapter 5

**Exam:** Chapters 1-4

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**Feb. 20 – Presidents' Day Recess – No Class**

9. Feb. 22 – **Copy Editing; Fact Sheets; Defamation & Invasion of Privacy**

**Due:** 5.4/Generate News

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10. Feb. 27 – **News Releases; Writing Style**

Read Chapter 6

**Due:** 5.5/Fact Sheet **and** 5.6/Factoid

11. March 1 – **Writing Leads**

**Due:** 6.7/Leads; 6.9/Benefit Statement; 6.10/Action-Info Statement

**Exam:** Editing Exam (take-home exam; **due in class** today)

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12. March 6 – **Localizing News Releases, Types of Releases, Follow-Up Releases**

**Due:** 6.11/News Release

13. March 8 – **Media Relations**

Read Chapter 7

**Exam:** Stylebook Exam

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14. March 13 – **Media Advisories & Captions**

**Due:** 7.2/Advisory; 7.4/Story Idea Memo

15. March 15 – **Broadcast Releases**

Read Chapter 8

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16. March 20 – **Features: Biographical Narratives and Personal Profiles**

Read Chapter 9

**Due:** 8.4/Radio Actuality

17. March 22 – **Features: Organizational Profiles, Backgrounders & How-To Articles**

**Due:** 9.2/Bio

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18. March 27 – **Features: Q & A Pieces and Case Studies**

**Due:** Reflection Paper #2

19. March 29 – **Opinion Pieces**

Read Chapter 10

**Due:** 9.6/Q & A

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**April 2-7 Spring Recess – No Classes**

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20. April 10 – **Fliers & Brochures**

Read Chapter 11, pp. 255-266

21. April 12 – **Web Writing**

Read Chapter 11, pp. 266-274

**Due:** 11.2/Brochure

**Exam:** Chapters 5-10

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22. April 17 – **Newsletters & Corporate Reports**

Read Chapter 12

**Due:** 11.3/Web Page

23. April 19 – **Direct Mail**

Read Chapter 13

**Due:** 12.3/Newsletter Article

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24. April 24 – **Public Relations Advertising**

Read Chapter 14

25. April 26 – **Speeches & Interviews**

Read Chapter 15

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26. May 1 – **Final Portfolio Presentations to Community Clients**

**Due:** Portfolio (including Reflection Paper #3)

27. May 3 – **Information Kits and Writing for News Conferences**

Read Chapters 16 & 17

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**Critique & Evaluation Period (Final Exam Week)**

28. Tuesday, May 8 (1:40-3:30 p.m.)

**Exam:** Chapters 11-17

Grades will be submitted by May 14<sup>th</sup>.