

Mondays 6:00 p.m. to 9:20 p.m.

AHF 259 (Studio C)

INSTRUCTOR:

Michael J. Furtney

Text Requirements:

Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques, 5th edition, by Dennis Wilcox
Current Associated Press (AP) Stylebook

Dictionary

Please bring these to class each session for in-class writing exercises.

Additional Reading/Absorbing: In order to be *au courant* with media across the country and beyond, regularly read *The Los Angeles Times*, one other national newspaper (*USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal* or *New York Times*), news magazines such as *Newsweek*, *TIME* or *BusinessWeek*; also save some time each day to watch local newscasts on television, as well as a national network broadcast news show; and listen to NPR or an all-news radio station such as KNX or KFWB here in the Los Angeles area. In your spare time, check out laobserved.com, cnn.com or other news aggregator sites to understand how those organizations cover the day's events.

These reading and broadcast assignments are not optional; to appreciate the ever-changing nature of the media and to understand how the writing projects you will produce this semester coalesce, developing a real grasp of the media is critical to your success in class and in your career. There will be unannounced quizzes to measure your adherence to this principle.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

What are the media? Where is technology steering them? What is their mission in today's society? How do they get their stories?

What is the role of public relations and its practitioners with respect to the media? What does the term "public relations" mean? What techniques do successful public relations professionals use in dealing with the media? What skills will future public relations people need to keep pace in the increasingly cyber-driven world of business, politics and entertainment?

In this class, we will answer these questions and examine the roles and relationships between the media and public relations.

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Course Objectives, cont.

You will write and write some more, from news releases and biographies to fact sheets and news advisories, from pitch letters to features and such basic tasks as photo captions and memoranda. In short, you will have the opportunity to produce all the varied materials needed to place our clients in the most advantageous scenario possible.

We expect you to possess solid writing skills already, and be prepared to put them to use in the many creative exercises that lie ahead. Good writing is at the core of any successful public relations effort, whether it is the chairman's letter in the annual report to shareholders or a news release announcing the next generation of iPhone.

There is no magic formula to succeeding with the media, and there are as many theories as there are people selling the latest "can't live without it" book. We will look at many of them and determine which have that ring of truth. More importantly, we will provide you with the knowledge to make a decision that leads to success.

Welcome.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

Punctuality: Class begins at 6:00 p.m. and will not wait for early dinners or campus activities that run late. You do NOT have to ask me for permission to miss a class, leave early or arrive late. Those are YOUR decisions, but missing class (remember, we meet only one evening a week) will leave a gap in your learning. You should find a classmate you can call on for notes, assignments, handouts, etc. should you miss a class.

Class Work: Assignments are due to me at the time I designate; faxed assignments will not be accepted. You are allowed one late assignment that will be graded a full grade lower and is due by 5:00 p.m. the Tuesday following class. If you "forgot" your homework, it will be considered late. You may email the assignment to me at any time prior to class, or you may bring a hard copy to class. No handwritten papers will be accepted. All assignments should be in "final" form -- that is, without editing marks or handwritten addenda.

Participation: Being a regular, thoughtful member of the class and taking an active part in our discussions will help your final grade. By the same token, overly strident and confrontational diatribes will harm your final grade. Any competent public relations professional should be able to make his/her point calmly and persuasively, without resorting to bombast. Let's have collegial and congenial as our guidelines.

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Mid-term: There will be no makeup for this exam/project. Similarly, there will be no extension for the final project. You must complete both to pass the class.

Quizzes: As noted earlier, there will be quizzes. They will cover both current events at the top of the media's "hit" list and items from the textbook reading assignments.

Classroom caveats: Please do not use computers during class, except for assignments given during the session. This extends to hand-held devices. Also, no food or beverages, as we are meeting in a computer lab and university regulations do not allow food or drink in these rooms. We will take a break at the mid-point of each class, and that should give you enough time for a quick snack.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:

Approach: I am truly excited to be teaching here, where I began my USC experience many years ago as a journalism student who was in the original trio to add public relations to our diplomas. Ironically, I am the only member of the trio who went into full-time p.r. My goal in this class is to share with you what I learned in 40 years of corporate communications at several Fortune 50 firms.

Guiding Principles: I welcome your questions and comments and will make time to meet with you individually outside class. I give each student the opportunity to demonstrate his/her understanding of the text and lecture materials through the process of preparing each assignment. I will apply the same style and content requirements you would expect in a top-rate public relations department or agency. That means give me your best work, not the first draft. Think of each class effort as you would a real work product. I will do my best to give you the results of my career lessons, and I hope you will return that intent with an equal commitment.

Syllabus: This syllabus is a general guideline for what we will cover this semester, but can be tweaked if necessary. There will be in-class writing assignments most weeks, supplemented by written homework and other projects to build your knowledge of our subject.

Writing: The goal of our class is to polish your writing skills and introduce you to the differences that set public relations writing aside from news writing and other forms of written communication. If I can help you in any way, I will be happy to do so. Please let me know immediately if any of my terms or comments don't make sense to you; this is your chance to hone your skills – mine are already in place.

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Contact: I will routinely be on campus Mondays from mid-afternoon until class, but I will be happy to arrange times to meet with you other days, schedule permitting. Email exchanges may be the simplest means of answering your questions, but please let me know if you prefer face-to-face.

THE FOLLOWING IS THE USC SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM'S ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY -- PLEASE READ IT CAREFULLY:

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own; in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the University catalog: *"Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to this policy."*

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union, Room 301; their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

ELEMENTS OF JOUR. 351-A

GRADING

In-class assignments	Writing assignments	25%
Take-home writing assignments	Mid-term exam	20%
Analysis reports	Press kit (final)	35%
Mid-term examination	Homework/quizzes	10%
Final project: press kit	Participation	10%
Participation		
Reading		
Quizzes		

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SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

1. August 27 – Let’s Go!

Housekeeping: Presentation and discussion of syllabus; reviewing class requirements and outlining the semester.

Down to Business: Beginning to define who the media are, what they do, what they want from public relations professionals.

In-class writing exercise: Write a one-page bio on yourself as you would for inclusion in a corporate/organizational public relations file for use by media.

Homework: Read Chapters 1 and 5

Bring to class (Sept. 10) a news story you think includes the work of a PR pro; type a brief summary (two-page maximum) of why you believe This; be prepared to discuss your findings.

2. September 10 – About the news release

The news release: its purpose, style and content. How do you write one?

In class: Review of news stories with PR bent; what material do we need to produce one? Where do we find such things? Discussion of homework; do our examples reflect “proper” techniques? How do we use the AP Stylebook?

Homework: Read Chapters 2 and 4

Write a news release using materials and data provided in class

3. September 17 – The news release, continued

Now that we’ve written one, how do we make it really good?

In class: Discussion of the fundamentals of good writing; how to refine your release.

Homework: Read Chapters 8 and 14 (pages 408-418)

Prepare a Media Analysis Report (we will discuss in class)

4. September 24 -- OK, now that we’ve nailed releases, what’s next?

In class: Examination of the full range of media collateral, such as pitch letters, advisories; how do they differ? What are their uses? When do we use them?

Homework: Read Chapter 6

Write a pitch letter or a media advisory for a special event

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5. October 1 – Beyond releases, advisories and pitch letters.

In class: What circumstances or opportunities provide an opening for a feature, a backgrounder or an executive profile?

Exercise: Write a lead (lede) for a feature, backgrounder or profile using data provided in class.

Homework: Read Chapter 7

Bring to class an example of feature, backgrounder or profile and your view of its origin. Placed by a p.r. type? Written “from scratch?”

6. October 8 – A picture is worth 1,000 words; still true?

In class: Examine news photos and determine which were placed by p.r. pro’s.
Discuss the methods of photo placement.

Homework: Outside reading, TBA

Reminder: Press kit proposals due next week

7. October 15 – Press kits, traditional and “new” – what’s in them, who uses them and why?

Press kit proposals due today.

In class: Mid-term exam review

8. October 22 – Mid-term examination

Homework: Read Chapter 17

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9. October 29 – Press Events: What works, what doesn't, when to do – or not.

In class: Media Analysis Reports continue.

Examine recent press events, news conferences; were they valuable?

Write a press advisory announcing a press event.

Homework: Read Chapter 11

10. November 5 – Special Guest

The relationship between the media and public relations.

In class: Media Analysis Reports continue.

Homework: Read Chapter 10

11. November 12 – Pitching the media: when to use a fastball...or a curve.

In class: Discuss the methods of pitching, the need to know how your target works, who the key gatekeepers are, how to get your message to the right place at the right time and in the right form.

Exercise: Write a 30-second pitch script designed to capture the attention of your target.

Homework: Bring to class a news report of a disaster or crisis; evaluate how the PR people involved performed. Write your findings in a one-page summary for discussion.

12. November 19 -- Crisis communications, what necessitates them and how to manage them, or at least avoid throwing more fuel on the fire.

In class: Review crisis stories and examine the success of public relations people establishing their position – or losing control of the story.

Exercise: Write a one-page crisis “positioning” statement based on a recent event.

Reminder: Press kits due next class!

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13. November 26 – Interview techniques – how to prepare for one; how to develop key message points; how to deflect tough questions. Do looks matter?

In class: Practice interview techniques; learn to keep comments brief and on point.

Homework: Read Chapter 9

14. December 3 – Last class. And for our next number....

Where do we go from here? What have we learned? Open microphone.
Press kits returned.

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