

**The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration  
Spring 2019**

**Course number:** 6077.11

**Logistics:** Thursday 6:10-8 pm

**Course title:** Professional Writing in Public Policy

**Course description:** The goal of writing in the public sphere is often persuasion, and the audience is typically a busy decision maker. Hence, a central focus of the course is on developing students' understanding of "reader-based writing," that is, writing that is easily accessible to busy decision makers and that helps them make informed policy decisions. Students will be introduced to core writing principles and how they are used in the public policy and public administration environment. Students will also become familiar with strategies for overcoming common writing challenges, so that students might be better prepared to draft persuasive public policy documents.

**Professors:** Colin Fallon ([fallon.colin@gmail.com](mailto:fallon.colin@gmail.com)) and Linda Miller ([linda.miller2@us.gt.com](mailto:linda.miller2@us.gt.com))

Texts: Joseph M. Williams, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*

Harvey Lilleywhite and Kevin Dungey, *Mastering Workplace Writing*

Both of these texts are available at Amazon.

**Student learning objectives:**

Students will become familiar with and apply writing principles to:

- Effectively plan their writing to meet readers' needs
- Develop persuasive messages based on data/evidence
- Write clearly and concisely for a busy decision maker
- Develop strategies to revise writing and incorporate feedback effectively
- Write collaboratively and negotiate different organizational writing cultures

**Instructional method:** The sessions will combine lecture, class discussion, and class activities. The instructors expect students to actively participate in each session and complete homework assignments. Across this 7-week half semester, students should expect to devote 7.5 hours per week to this class. This total includes a two-hour class session each week, as well as an approximate average of 5.5 hours of out-of-class time spent on class preparation and assignments.

### **Assignments/grading:**

**Message development (20% of grade):** Students will write a 2-3 page paper based on a list of data points provided by instructors on a given topic. Grades will be based on the effective use of data to persuade a decision maker to take a particular course of action.

**Revision (20% of grade):** Students will revise a document to improve organization, logic, clarity and readability.

**Final paper (40% of grade):** Students will write a 5-10 page paper, which can be developed for another class, that incorporates all the principles covered in the course. Elements to incorporate include: persuasiveness, organization, and clarity.

**Class participation (20% of grade):** This class succeeds best if students come to class prepared to engage with each other and the instructors.

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### **Session 1 (Jan. 17)**

#### ***Introduction to the Course and Overview of Writing in Public Policy***

#### **Questions:**

- What makes good public policy writing?
- Why does it matter who your audience is?
- What does your reader want?
- How do you establish credibility as a writer?

Assignment (due Jan. 26):

Bring to class a recent paper, or excerpt of a paper (no more than 5 pages), for instructors to review. This paper will **NOT** be graded. We simply want to provide you an opportunity to see the kinds of comments we might typically make to enhance a document's persuasiveness, organization, and clarity.

### **Session 2 (Jan. 24)**

#### ***Planning Your Document***

#### **Questions:**

- Why should you start with the end in mind?
- What happens when writing is poorly planned?
- What questions should you ask yourself to help target your writing?

- What tools and techniques can help you plan well?

Assignment (due Jan. 31):

Develop an outline, a visual display, a mind map, or some tool that shows how you are synthesizing and analyzing the data we have provided you about teen driver safety. Important: we will soon ask you to write a persuasive argument outlining the option(s) you recommend. Use this assignment to organize your thoughts.

### **Session 3 (Jan. 31)**

#### ***Developing a Persuasive Argument***

##### **Questions:**

- What do you need to be persuasive?
- What are the enemies of a persuasive argument?
- How do you develop a persuasive argument?
- How much information do you need to persuade your reader?

Assignment: Using the data we provided, and the organizational structure you developed, write a persuasive argument for the option(s) you choose to recommend to the governor of North Dakota for improving teen driver safety. Present your argument concisely, in a document no longer than three pages.

### **Session 4 (Feb. 7)**

#### ***Writing Clearly***

##### **Questions:**

- What is “writer-based” writing?
- How can you make life easier for your reader?
- What are the underlying principles of clear writing?

### **Session 5 (Feb. 14)**

#### ***Revising Your Writing***

##### **Questions:**

- What is the difference between revising and editing?
- Why is revising necessary?
- What are some strategies for being your own reviewer?

- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your revisions?

Assignment (due Feb. 21): Revise your teen driver safety document.

### **Session 6 (Feb. 21)**

#### ***Writing within Different Organizational Climates***

#### **Questions:**

- How does organizational climate affect your writing?
- What challenges might team-based, collaborative writing environments pose?
- How does your organizational structure affect the feedback you receive?
- What questions should you ask to clarify feedback?
- How do you decide what feedback to incorporate?
- How will you incorporate feedback?
- How do you avoid taking it personally?

Assignment (due Feb. 28): Complete a 5-10 page paper, incorporating principles of reader-friendly writing discussed throughout this class.

### **Session 7 (Feb. 28)**

#### ***Review: Reader-Friendly Writing as Public Policy Writing***