MSAS 763: Professional Writing for Public Administrators

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Email: Lynita.Newswander@usd.edu

Required Text:

Swain, John; Swain, Kathleen (2014). *Effective Writing in the Public Sector*. Taylor and Francis. 076564150X

Strunk and White. *Elements of Style*. (feel free to use any edition of this book)


Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the communication tools, skills, and style necessary for public administration professionals and academics. Public policy is shaped by the way it is communicated verbally and written in documents, and the strategies taught in this course will help to prepare you to communicate clearly and effectively with the public you serve. These include the basics of good writing and research, as well as more specific guidelines regarding audience, voice, and clarity. Students may expect a combination of short reading and writing assignments that will allow you to practice writing several types of public and academic documents over the course of the semester.

Goals:

It is my hope that you will leave this course with a better understanding of public policy and the way that the communication of policy can influence politics. By the end of this course, you will:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Be able to conduct scholarly research of government documents and use proper APA formatting for writing and references</td>
<td>Short writing assignments, final paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Define and describe the key elements of well-written public communications</td>
<td>Short writing assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand how public communication can influence</td>
<td>Discussion board</td>
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politics, and questions

Write memos, letters, email, media releases, newsletters, formal reports, and a grant proposal

Homework and other assignments

Methods of Assessment:

**Discussion board questions:** *(15% of final grade)* For each of the three sections of the course, students will be asked to participate in peer discussion via the discussion boards on D2L. The instructor will provide the specific topic for discussion, and discussion boards will be open for the entire corresponding period of the course (for example, discussion board 1 is open from week 1 to week 4). Students will need to author an original post responding to the instructor’s topic, as well as write at least 2 substantive responses to peer posts. Comments need to be well-thought out. When you agree or disagree with certain points, you must provide substantial reasons; merely saying “I agree” or “I disagree” is not enough. Comments should be at least a paragraph long (4 to 5 sentences). Please remember to be civil in these discussions, even in disagreement. In your engagement activities (and for all written communication in this class), please follow the USD’s General Netiquette guidelines found in the CE Online Orientation: [http://www.usd.edu/~media/files/usc-online/online-orientation-guide.ashx?la=en](http://www.usd.edu/~media/files/usc-online/online-orientation-guide.ashx?la=en). It is expected that students will write in a formal tone, use complete sentences, and check spelling. Entries for each week are worth a total of 5 points.

**Homework assignments:** *(40% of final grade)* There will be a total of 10 short homework assignments, worth 4 points each. There will be one homework assignment for weeks 1-8, followed by assignments related to choosing a topic for the formal report and grant assignments (weeks 9 and 13, respectively).

**Formal Report:** *(20% of final grade)*
The formal report is a research paper on a topic of your choosing, related to public policy or of public interest. The report will need to be between 8-10 pages long. Please note that this includes a title page, abstract, table of contents, and references. Therefore, the written text will be approximately 5 pages, double-spaced. Formatting guidelines can be found in Chapter 9 of the assigned text.

**Grant Proposal:** *(25% of final grade)*
The Grant Proposal is a research paper on a topic of your choosing, related to public policy or of public interest. It may be the same topic as the formal report—in fact, this is advisable. The grant proposal will need to be between 8-10 pages long. Please note that this includes a cover letter and reference page. Therefore, the written text will be approximately 6-7 pages in length. Formatting guidelines can be found in Chapters 10-12 of the assigned text.
Final grades will be determined as follows:

**Evaluation**

- Discussion posts: 15 points
- Homework assignments: 40 points
- Formal Report: 20 points
- Grant Proposal: 25 points

**Grading Scale**

- 90% and above: A
- 80% to 89%: B
- 70% to 79%: C
- 60% to 69%: D
- 59% and below: F

**Expectations:**

**Students**

Students will be expected to understand the course syllabus and follow the course schedule. Students are expected to keep up on the weekly readings and assignments must be completed on time. If there is an emergency or conflict with the schedule, students must contact the instructor prior to any scheduling issue. Participation is absolutely necessary, especially in an on-line course and therefore students should be willing to voice their opinions in an appropriate manner.

In addition, students should familiarize themselves with the CE Online Orientation that can be accessed from this link: [http://www.usd.edu/~media/files/usd-online/online-orientation-guide.ashx?la=en](http://www.usd.edu/~media/files/usd-online/online-orientation-guide.ashx?la=en). Please take advantage of the technical and student support services that the Division of Continuing Education provides.

**Instructor**

The instructor will be accessible to students through email, office calls, and discussion boards. All phone calls and emails will be replied within 48 hours. The instructor will also provide timely feedback on all examinations and assignments via email within two weeks from the end of the week the assignment was due and strive to provide the best educational environment.

**Technology Requirements:**

The University of South Dakota requires that students satisfy certain technology requirements, which can be found in the CE Online Orientation document: [http://www.usd.edu/~media/files/usd-online/online-orientation-guide.ashx?la=en](http://www.usd.edu/~media/files/usd-online/online-orientation-guide.ashx?la=en). For this class, students will be expected to need: Microsoft Word, Abode Acrobat Reader, and
Course Policies:

**Academic Integrity**
The College of Arts and Sciences considers plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty inimical to the objectives of higher education. The College supports the imposition of penalties on students who engage in academic dishonesty, as defined in the “Conduct” section of the University of South Dakota Student Handbook.

No credit can be given for a dishonest assignment. A student found to have engaged in any form of academic dishonesty may, at the discretion of the instructor, be:

a. Given a zero for that assignment.
b. Allowed to rewrite and resubmit the assignment for credit.
c. Assigned a reduced grade for the course.
d. Dropped from the course.
e. Failed in the course.

**Freedom in Learning**
Under Board of Regents and University policy, student academic performance may be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Students who believe that an academic evaluation reflects prejudiced or capricious consideration of student opinions or conduct unrelated to academic standards should contact the dean of the college or school that offers the class to initiate a review of the evaluation.

**Disability Accommodation**
Any student who feels s/he may need academic accommodations or access accommodations based on the impact of a documented disability should contact and register with Disability Services during the first week of class or as soon as possible after the diagnosis of a disability. Disability Services is the official office to assist students through the process of disability verification and coordination of appropriate and reasonable accommodations. Students currently registered with Disability Services must obtain a new accommodation memo each semester.

Please note: if your home institution is not the University of South Dakota but one of the other South Dakota Board of Regents institutions (e.g., SDSU, SDSMT, BHSU, NSU, DSU), you should work with the disability services coordinator at your home institution.

Disability Services
Service Center North, R119B
(605) 677-6389
Diversity and Inclusive Excellence
The University of South Dakota strives to foster a globally inclusive learning environment where opportunities are provided for diversity to be recognized and respected. To learn more about USD’s diversity and inclusiveness initiatives, please visit the website for the Office of Diversity.
## Schedule of Classes

### Part 1: The Basics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Jan 7-13)</td>
<td>Introductions and getting started</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>post an introduction on course website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>under the discussion section marked “introductions”). This introduction is your Homework #1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(Jan 14-20)</td>
<td>Writing for a Purpose</td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>homework #2 due in dropbox Jan 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(Jan 21-27)</td>
<td>Mechanics of professional writing</td>
<td>chapter 2 and posted online</td>
<td>homework #3 due in dropbox Jan 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(Jan 28-Feb 3)</td>
<td>Polishing and proofreading</td>
<td>chapters 3-4</td>
<td>homework #4 due in drop box by Feb 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part 2: Short Writing Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(Feb 4-10)</td>
<td>Memos and Letters</td>
<td>chapter 5</td>
<td>Homework #5 due in dropbox by Feb 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(Feb 11-17)</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>chapter 6</td>
<td>Homework #6 due in dropbox by Feb 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>(Feb 18-24)</td>
<td>Media Releases</td>
<td>chapter 7</td>
<td>Homework #7 due in dropbox by Feb 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(Feb 25-Mar 3)</td>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>chapter 8</td>
<td>Homework #8 due in dropbox by Mar 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### March 4-10

*SPRING BREAK*
**Part 3: Formal Report and Grant Writing**

Week 9: (March 11-17)
- Topic: Formal Reports
- Readings: chapter 9
- Assignment: Select topic and post in dropbox by Mar 17 (This is homework #9)

Week 10: (March 18-24)
- Topic: Research for formal report
- Readings: TBA
- Assignment:

Week 11: (March 25-31)
- Topic: Writing the Formal Report
- Readings: none
- Assignment: Formal report due March 31

Week 12: (April 1-7)
- Topic: Grant Proposals
- Readings: chapters 10-12
- Assignment: n/a

Week 13: (April 8-14)
- Topic: Topic Selection for Grant Proposal
- Readings: none
- Assignment: Post selected topic to dropbox by Apr 14 (This is homework #10)

Weeks 14 and 15: (April 15-28)
- Topic: Research for the Grant Proposal
- Readings: none
- Assignment: peer review assignment on discussion board

Week 16: (April 29-May 3)
- Assignment: Grant Proposal due May 3.