POLICY WRITING FUNDAMENTALS

George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government
FALL 2018 DRAFT

GENERAL INFORMATION

Listing: PUBP 570-001
Time/Location: Monday, 07.20 – 10.00 pm / FH TBD
Instructor: Dr. Christine Pommerening
Email: cpommere@gmu.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Designed for entering students whose writing skills and style must satisfy the demands of a rigorous graduate program; the course aims to give students the ability and confidence to write clearly and concisely for a variety of policy audiences; reviews basic rules and develops essential techniques for effective writing in graduate school and beyond.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The course aims to enhance your proficiency in identifying and using appropriate, authoritative source material and in writing and speaking articulately, succinctly, logically, and convincingly. This course will introduce different forms and styles of policy writing, including proper use of terminology.

However, it is not an English grammar or spelling class. Writing assignments should be largely free of such errors. If necessary, you will need to obtain assistance outside of class.

Upon completion of this course, you should be well prepared for the remainder of your Master’s program, and well underway toward becoming a skilled policy writer.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Knowledge and understanding:
   - Differentiating between information and communication
   - Understanding the role of different forms of written and verbal communication in public policy
   - Discerning various audiences and stakeholders in the policy process

2. Professional development and leadership skills:
   - Writing logical, evidence-based arguments
   - Writing persuasive essays
   - Reviewing and critiquing the writing of others
   - Applying effective revising and editing techniques
   - Producing written deliverables according to professional standards
REQUIREMENTS

You will be asked to work individually and in teams to improve your reading, writing and editing skills in a variety of in-class and at-home exercises.

For this purpose, you will need to bring a laptop or notebook to every class. Assignments need to be prepared as follows

1. Submit via Blackboard Assignment tab by 12pm
2. Bring hardcopy to class:
   a. Cover sheet with name and last two digits of G number
   b. Rest without name and only last two digits of G on papers, for peer review

Grades will be apportioned in the following manner:

**Class participation 20%**

This evaluation is based on observations and interactions relevant to the course over the semester. The criteria include: class attendance, quality and quantity of contributions in class and online, completion of ungraded assignments, and participation in the creation and maintenance of a mutual learning space.

*Missing more than three classes will result in a grade reduction. If you need to miss a class, please send me a short email in advance.*

**Six short papers: 10% each**

This evaluation is based on two separate three-part series of assignments, each part building on and refining the previous. The criteria include: logical argumentation, appropriate structure, proper evidence, incorporation of edits, appropriate use of terminology, as well as correct spelling and grammar.

*Papers are due on the day indicated on the schedule by noon.*

**Two review exercises: 10% each**

This evaluation is based on two in-class and/or online exercises reviewing and critiquing other authors’ works. The criteria include: accuracy, speed, and constructive improvements.

*Exercises are due on the day indicated on the schedule by noon.*
### SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic / Assignment</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26 Aug</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of the Course</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>02 Sep</td>
<td>Principles of Information and Communication:</td>
<td>Peterson Shovel</td>
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<td>Sender, Receiver, Medium</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>09 Sep</td>
<td>Forms of Policy Writing: Memos, Briefs, Analyses</td>
<td>Strunk/White Bardach</td>
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<td><em>Paper 1.1 Due</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>16 Sep</td>
<td>Forms of Policy Writing: Notices, Rules, Regulations</td>
<td>Fed Plain Language Guideline I-III</td>
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<td><em>Paper 1.2 Due</em></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>23 Sep</td>
<td>Forms of Policy Writing: Websites, Social Media</td>
<td>Fed Plain Language Guideline IV</td>
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<td><em>Paper 1.3 Due</em></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>30 Sep</td>
<td>Forms of Policy Writing: Speeches, Testimonies</td>
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<td><em>Paper 1 Critique</em></td>
<td>De Wolf Kent</td>
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<td>07 Oct</td>
<td>Crisis Communication Case Study</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15 Oct</td>
<td><em>Editing Exercise I: Student Writing</em></td>
<td>Parish Walt</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>21 Oct</td>
<td><em>Editing Exercise II: Expert Writing</em></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>28 Oct</td>
<td>Political Communication Case Study</td>
<td>Lufkens Orwell</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>04 Nov</td>
<td>Sources and References for Policy Writing:</td>
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<td>Academia, Government, Media</td>
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<td><em>Paper 2.1 Due</em></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11 Nov</td>
<td><em>Paper 2.2 Due</em></td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>18 Nov</td>
<td>—Thanksgiving Break—</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>25 Nov</td>
<td><em>Paper 2.3 Due</em></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>2 Dec</td>
<td><em>Paper 2 Critique</em></td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>16 Dec</td>
<td>—Exam Day—</td>
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READING LIST


Johnson, R.L.G. *Briefly.* The Economist, August 6, 2015. Available at: https://www.economist.com/prospero/2015/08/06/briefly


Walt, Stephen M. *Why Is Academic Writing So Bad?* February 12, 2013. Available at: http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/15/on_writing_well


GENERAL GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

**Papers**

Writing research and policy papers is a fundamental part of graduate study. The quality of a paper is determined by a number of factors, including presentation of facts, development of argumentation, clarity of analysis, acknowledgment of sources, and accuracy of format and style. A good guideline for elements and format of a research paper and bibliography, including online sources, is *A Pocket Style Manual*, Seventh Edition (2015), by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers.

**Presentations**

Being able to prepare and conduct a presentation of current or proposed work is essential in any professional environment. The quality of a presentation depends on what is discussed and how it is communicated to the audience. A good paper or outline is the basis, but it is equally important to develop a script specifically for the presentation. It should lay out how to introduce the topic to the audience, which parts to emphasize and which to skip, how to close the presentation and start the discussion. It is highly recommended to stage a dry-run ahead of time to test the format (stand-alone, with slides, power-point supported, etc.) and to properly manage the time allotted.

**Grading**

All written and oral assignments will be judged using the GMU system for grading graduate courses as laid out in the university catalog. Grades earned for each assignment will be added numerically, and the weighted average will be used to determine the final grade, which allows for the grades of A, A-, B+, B, B-, as well as C, F, and IN. Assignments that are submitted late will lead to a grade reduction, up to being marked as missed entirely. Unacceptably frequent periods of absence (missing more than three classes) will result in grade reduction as well. No extra credit will be given.

**Electronic Communication and Blackboard**

The GMU email accounts are the primary and authoritative means of electronic communication; announcements regarding classes will be sent to those accounts only. Students are free to use other accounts, but are solely responsible for any failed communication, missed deadline, etc. Blackboard will also be used to post announcements, presentations, and other items, so be sure to check regularly. I generally respond to emails within 24 hours during the week.

**Special Needs**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me, and contact the Office of Disability Services at [http://ods.gmu.edu/](http://ods.gmu.edu/). All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS before classes start.
Policy on Plagiarism

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

Honor Code

George Mason University shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The Honor Code is an integral part of university life. In the spirit of the code, a student's word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

This course is subject to all policies of the George Mason University Honor Code as laid out in the university catalog. As stated above, the provisions regarding plagiarism are particularly relevant. The best way of avoiding plagiarism charges is rigorous and meticulous documentation and, to the extent possible, retention, of all sources that are used for preparing papers and presentations. While it is not necessary to cite a source for every single statement, it is expected that students reference major sources in a way that allows fellow students and other readers to identify them. This means e.g. when citing an author in the text, the cited work needs to be referenced in full in the bibliography, and the bibliographic citations need to be complete and verifiable.