INTRODUCTION

Government policies are basically intended to prevent or solve public problems. In the process of formulating, developing and advocating proposals, policy professionals often need to communicate effectively with different audiences: fellow policy professionals, organization or agency leaders, stake-holders, government decision-makers and the public. A persuasive case must be made for a proposed policy’s need and benefits using well-reasoned, well-supported arguments. This requires communication in clear and concise language to each of these different audiences.

The written word is the currency of policy and public affairs communication, and graduate students in public policy should be able to demonstrate advanced writing ability. Course assignments are aimed at providing opportunities for students to polish their writing skills and to adapt them to a variety of policy and public affairs purposes, including policy memoranda, position papers, public testimony, speeches and opinion columns.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course, students will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the way public policy/public affairs messages are developed and disseminated;

2. Be able to write effective briefing memoranda, testimony, talking points and news releases;

3. Be able to write a convincing op-ed suitable for publication;

4. Be able to write a persuasive public affairs speech applying the appropriate processes, rhetorical elements and devices;

5. Develop a portfolio of writing samples, including a briefing memo, news release, talking points, op-ed and a five-minute speech.
READING

Textbooks:


Electronic Reserves

*Advocacy; Championing Ideas and Influencing Others, Daly, J.; Yale University Press (2011) (Ch. 3, 6 & 10)*

*Beyond Argument; A handbook for Opinion Writers and Editors, Casey, M. and Drake, M.; National Conference of Editorial Writers (2010) (Ch. 2 & 3)*


*Editorial and Persuasive Writing, 2nd Edition; Stonecipher, H.; Hastings House (1990) (Ch. 7)*

*Marketing Management and Communications in the Public Sector, Pasquier, M and Villeneuve, J.; Routledge (2012) (Ch. 8)*

*News; the Politics of Illusion, Bennett, W; Pearson Education (2007) (Ch. 3, 4 & 5)*

*The Political Brain; The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation; Westen, D; Public Affairs, (2007) (Ch. 1 & 2)*

*The Political Speechwriter’s Companion: a guide for writers and speakers; Lehrman, R; CQ Press, (2009) (Ch. 1, 2 & 3)*

*Words that Work; It’s not what you say, it’s what people hear; Luntz, F; Hyperion Books, (2007) (Ch. 1, 2 & 3)*

ASSIGNMENTS

Policy communication professionals work in a deadline-driven profession, and generally have to get it right the first time. All work should be submitted on time, be well-written and neatly presented. Use Spell Check, but also proofread your work before you hand it in. Most assignments will be peer edited before submission.
**Assignment Grading**

Students can earn a total of 325 points during the class for the following:

1. 9 individual writing assignments: 250 points total
   - 600-word Policy Briefing Memo on your issue (25 points)
   - Position Paper on your issue (25 points)
   - Issue Talking Points (25 points)
   - Written Comments (25 points)
   - Legislative Committee Oral Testimony (25 points)
   - Issue News Release with fact sheet or backgrounder (25 points)
   - 750-word Op-ed (40 points)
   - 5-paragraph Speech Analysis (25 points)
   - 5-minute policy speech (35 points)

2. Final Paper: 50 points

3. Discussion/Activity participation: 25 points

**OVERALL GRADING**

Total points earned are divided into total points possible to determine a percentage grade, which is converted into a final letter grade according to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73%</td>
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</tbody>
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By George Mason University standards, the grade of A is Excellent; B is Good; C is Barely Satisfactory. The grading of your written assignments is inherently subjective. I have no wish to use a formula that deducts a certain number of points for each typo or misspelled word. But, typos, misspellings and grammatical mistakes convey a lack of care and attention and cannot be overlooked in the assignment’s evaluation. Policy communication professionals generally have to get it right the first time. So should you. We work in a deadline-driven profession. All work should be submitted on time; be well-written and neatly presented. Use Spell Check, but also proof read your work.

**SCHAR SCHOOL POLICY ON PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes 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 allows arguments, evidence and claims to be used and 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 Schar 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 Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

**STATEMENT ON SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Class #1: Introductions/Course Overview/Logistics**

**Discussion:** Why is policy/public affairs communication necessary?  
**Discussion:** What is good writing? What is effective writing?  
**Activity:** Discuss Greg Mankiw article: *How to Write Well*:  
[http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com/2006/10/how-to-write-well.html](http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com/2006/10/how-to-write-well.html); Excerpts from William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well; Putting the Pieces Together*  
**Discussion:** Selecting your policy/organization/principal  
**Reading:** *Writing Public Policy*, Ch. 2; Online: *Marketing Management and Communications in the Public Sector*, Ch. 8.

**WRITING TO EXPLAIN**

**Class #2: Framing the Issue**

**Discussion:** Connecting to your audience(s)/ Framing the problem; Framing the solution  
**Discussion:** Policy Briefing Memo  
**Reading:** *Writing Public Policy*, Ch. 3 & 8; *Media Relations Handbook*, pp. 192-93  
**Assignment:** Draft 600-word Policy Briefing Memo on your topic (for peer editing in next class)
Class #3: Position Papers
   Peer Edit: Policy Briefing Memo (edit or rewrite for submission)
   Discussion: Policy Position Paper
   Activity: Small groups develop outline for policy position paper on assigned topic
   Reading: Writing Public Policy, Ch. 6; Online: Advocacy, Ch. 6
   Assignment: Draft a Position Paper on your issue

WRITING TO INFLUENCE

Class #4: Talking Points
   Peer Edit: Policy Position Paper
   Activity: Talking Points
   Discussion: Small groups develop and present Issue Talking Points
   Reading: Online: Words That Work, Ch. 1, 2 & 3; Thinking Points, Ch. 4; Advocacy, Ch. 3
   Assignment: Draft a set of Talking Points on your issue

Class #5: Written Comment
   Peer Edit: Talking Points
   Activity: Small Groups develop talking points on assigned issues
   Discussion: Comments for the record; “How could anybody have a problem with this policy?”
   Reading: Writing Public Policy, Ch. 10
   Assignment: Draft written comments on your issue

Class #6: Writing Oral Testimony
   Peer Edit: Written Comments
   Discussion: “Mr. Chairman/ Madam Chairwoman…”
   Guest Speaker: Congressional Communication Director
   Activity: Committee hearing small group exercise
   Reading: Writing Public Policy, Ch. 9; Online: Advocacy, Ch. 10
   Assignment: Draft committee oral testimony for your issue

COLUMBUS DAY WEEK NO CLASS

Class #7: Advocating Public Policy
   Peer Edit: Public testimony
   Discussion: Advocacy Communication/ Influencing policy from outside government
   Guest Speaker: Dave Tully, Legislative Affairs, Blue Cross/Blue Shield
   Reading: Media Relations Handbook, pp, 57-62
   Assignment: Draft a public event plan for your policy issue (Not a graded assignment)
Class #8: Crisis Communication/Communication Ethics
Peer Edit: Public event plan
Discussion: Crisis Communication
Activity: Policy Crisis Videos
Activity: Crisis Communication News Conference Exercise
Discussion: Ethics in Policy Communication
Reading: *Media Relations Handbook*, Ch. 6 & 12

WRITING TO PERSUADE

Class #9: Persuasion in Public Policy
Discussion: Developing a persuasive policy message
Guest Speaker: House Committee staff
Discussion: Disseminating your message; News releases/Fact Sheets/Backgrounders
Activity: Small groups translate legislation into news releases
Reading: *Media Relations Handbook*, Ch. 2; Online: *The Political Brain*, Ch. 1 & 2.
Assignment: Write a News Release following a committee hearing on your policy issue

Class #10: Opinion Writing
Discussion: Election/Editorials, Letters to the Editor, Op-eds, Blogs and Pitches
Activity: Letters to the Editor on assigned topic
Reading: Online: *Beyond Argument*, Ch. 2 & 3; *Editorial and Persuasive Writing*, Ch. 7;
Articles on opinion writing
Assignment: Write 750-word Op-ed (Bring to class on laptop/ext. drive, etc. for editing)

Class #11: Op-ed Writing Follow-Up
Activity: Op-ed Peer Editing (Writer makes changes);
Guest Speaker: Jim Downie, Online Opinion Editor, Washington Post
Activity: Editing Exercise
Assignment: Submit edited Op-ed

Class #12: Speechwriting/Analysis
Discussion: Speechwriting Analysis (handout)
Activity: Good or bad policy speech videos presented by students
Reading: *The Political Speechwriter’s Companion*, Ch. 1 & 3; Online: CRS
*Speechwriting Guide; In the Words of My Speechwriter* Washington Post article
Assignment: Write a 5-paragraph speech analysis
Class #13: Speechwriting
- **Discussion:** The Art of Speechwriting
- **Guest Speaker:** Presidential Speechwriter
- **Reading:** *Political Speechwriter’s Companion*, Ch. 5, 6 & 7
- **Assignment:** Write a five-minute policy speech and be prepared to deliver it

Class #14: Policy Communication in New Media
- **Activity:** 5-minute policy speech presentations
- **Discussion:** New Media: Reaching a different audience in a different way
- **Guest Speaker:**
  - **Activity:** Class teaches instructor how New Media can be used in policy communication.
- **Reading:** *Media Relations Handbook*, Ch. 6; *Writing Public Policy*, Appendix: *Public Policy Writing for the Web*
- **Assignment:** Final Paper Topic and Due Date TBD