



**THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

JOHN GLENN COLLEGE
OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**Written and Oral Communications Skills - 6500
Fall Semester 2015**

Tuesdays, 5:45–7:35 p.m.
Hagerty Hall 0062
Credit Hours: 2

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Being an effective communicator can determine the reach and impact of policy, as well as the ability to influence change. In this course, you will become a better writer and speaker on a topic of public policy—including communicating to diverse audiences with differing information demands.

By writing and critiquing your own work and that of your in-class colleagues, you will hone your abilities as a writer and editor. By preparing yourself and others to speak on policy topics, you will better understand the importance of delivering a concise and convincing policy argument via testimony and speeches. At the completion of the course, you will have created a portfolio of artifacts that demonstrates your mastery of communications tactics, and you will have a better sense of communications strategy to apply to future policy problems.

The purpose of the course is to learn and use communications strategies and tactics that inform and influence policy and management issues. The instructor will help you learn to create communications strategy and activate tactics to reach policy goals. Readings and homework assignments will strengthen your individual capabilities. A team project will enhance your interpersonal skills and accelerate your writing and speaking capabilities by requiring you to tackle a real-life policy problem from a communications perspective.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course includes a combination of in-class discussions and interactive activities, complemented by readings and out-of-class individual and team assignments. **The overarching goal is for students to communicate policy issues and solutions effectively and efficiently to target audiences.** By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. **Write a succinct policy brief and position paper**, both of which leverage research to inform a contemporary policy or management issue;
2. **Speak articulately about policy or management issues in high-pressure situations**, such as media interviews and legislative testimony;
3. **Facilitate communication about a policy issue for a productive meeting** with stakeholders, involving preparation, delivery, and response to questions – both hostile and friendly; and
4. **Write for communications channels that influence modern policy creations and implementation**, including the Web, video, traditional media, and social media.

GRADING AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade for this class will be assessed through specific individual and team assignments, as well as through your contribution to the class and group discussions and activities. The overall grade distribution is provided below, followed by a detailed description of each graded component and the number of potential points that can be earned for each graded component.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Individual Assignments 40%

Professional Bio 5%

Policy Brief Detailed Outline and Draft 10%

Final Submission of Policy Brief 25%

Team Assignments 35%

Interview Notes 5%

Position Paper 15%

Final Presentation 15%

Individual In-Class Contribution 25%

Team Colleague Evaluation 10%

Instructor Evaluation 15% (includes participation in Team Lab)

See specific point values for each assignment in [Graded Components](#).

NOTE: In-class contribution is based upon both attendance and participation.

- *ATTENDANCE: Since the class only meets once per week, your attendance is critical to your team and instructor grades for in-class contribution. If you are absent, please let me know your specific circumstances, and I will take this into consideration when determining your grade.*
- *DISTRACTIONS: If you are present in class but are distracted by other reading, texting, or social media, I will reduce your in-class contribution points. "Being here now" makes a difference.*

TOTAL 100%

Transformation of a numerical grade to a letter grade will be according to the schedule below:

A	93-100	B+	87-89.9	C+	77-79.9	D+	67-69.9
A-	90-92.9	B	83-86.9	C	73-76.9	D	60-66.9
		B-	80-82.9	C-	70-72.9	F	<60

POLICY PROJECT TEAMS AND TOPICS

The work for this course revolves around a public policy topic that each student will explore, individually and within an assigned group, based upon interests expressed by students prior to the semester.

One topic assigned by the instructor will frame your efforts to improve your policy communications acumen, and you will receive information about the topic, sponsoring organization, and fellow team members in the first class of the semester.

The organization representative sponsoring each team will provide their team with this standard set of expertise and resources to inform and support their efforts:

- Written summary of the policy problem and a list of sources for factual background information.
- A one-hour phone, in person, or email interview to brief the team on the policy issue and answer any questions.
- One 20-minute "lifeline" call during the semester to answer any burning questions from the team.

Because project sponsors are busy, they will not be available for reviewing drafts, listening to presentations in progress, taking random phone calls or emails, or additional support throughout the semester. It will be important for each team to be highly organized and professional when interfacing with their project sponsor, both so that they can make most effective use of their time together and make a good impression upon the sponsor. This is how positive influence takes form in real life, and the class is no different.

GRADED COMPONENTS

Becoming an effective policy communicator does not happen overnight. It is both an art and a science, developed over time as a result of hard work and a lot of practice. The more you work at it, the better you become. This course will give you ample opportunity to practice and refine your strategic intuition and your tactical skills.

Knowing how to create effective policy communications often involves making mistakes. While making mistakes is embarrassing (and risky) in real life, it is essential for learning and moving to the next level. This class is a safe forum for improving your own process and the final results. By flubbing your delivery on practice presentations, you will improve your delivery on your final presentation. By not clearly describing your policy problem in an early draft, you will learn how to better communicate it for the final version.

During the semester, most of our time will be focused on learning how to create communications materials—position papers, policy briefs, media kits, written and oral testimony, websites, video assets, and slide decks. Revising drafts for the policy brief and position paper will give you a chance to hone your skills and polish the final products that will count more heavily for your team and individual grades.

Communications do not happen in a vacuum. In real life, there are many target audiences judging your work. Often, your most helpful constructive critics are your colleagues, which is why many of your efforts throughout the semester—both in writing and through presentation—will be shared with your colleagues and critiqued in class. The instructor will also be giving you in-class feedback, as well as more formal feedback on drafts turned in for homework. You will learn from the instructor, as well as from each other.

Below are descriptions of the assignments that each individual and team will create during the course, along with two writing labs that are also a part of your grade. Due dates are listed in the Assignment Calendar section of this syllabus. Point values are listed in parentheses after the name of the assignment. **Each student's final grade will be generated by dividing the number of points earned by the total potential point value of 100.**

Part 1: Individual Assignments

- **Professional Bio of Colleague** (5 points) – As a way to better know team members and as an activity to strengthen professional writing skills, each student will interview a fellow team member and write his or her professional bio (2 pages double-spaced). The bios will be critiqued in class by the person each student interviews, so please bring a hard copy to class on the day that this assignment is due and save to your dropbox on Carmen. There is a sample bio posted on Carmen for your reference. Questions to answer in the bio include the following:
 1. What are his/her current and previous position titles and responsibilities?
 - List names of specific clients or projects with timeframes, testimonials, and demonstration of impact and/or measurable results of the work.
 2. List his/her expertise and capabilities or areas of strength.
 - For example, are there unique differentiators that make your colleague stand out from the crowd?
- **Policy Brief** – A cornerstone document for all policy communications, the policy brief can be created for and shared with policy makers and implementers. It summarizes the policy

problem, background, stakeholders and their positions on the issue, and trends or scenarios that may help to project possible outcomes. Each student will address one aspect of his/her overall team's policy issue in detail in a policy brief.

- **Detailed Outline** (3 points): You will first write a detailed outline to be critiqued in class by a team colleague (3 pages double-spaced).
- **First Draft** (7 points): Informed by colleague feedback on your detailed outline, you will turn in for instructor review a completed first draft (8 pages double-spaced).
- **Final Version** (25 points): Finally, each student will further evolve his/her policy brief for the final draft (10 pages double-spaced) due to the instructor at the end of the course.

Part 2: Team Assignments

- **Background Interview with Project Sponsor and Notes** (5 points) - The interview can be either in person, by phone, or via email, but it must address these questions:
 1. How would you describe the core policy issue of _____? OR How do you define the policy problem?
 - Scope (geography, impacted audiences/publics)
 - Impact, short- and long-term
 2. What are the angles that you'd like to see us explore in more detail (in the position paper, policy briefs, and other materials)?
 3. What recommendations do you have for how to solve the policy issue/problem?
 4. What additional resources beyond those in the initial project description should we explore for backgrounding?
 - Written resources (media, policy background, websites, etc.)
 - Additional interviews
 5. How will you know that our project is a success?
 6. What is the best way for us to reach you for our "lifeline call" (20 minutes) later in the semester?

The team will turn in notes from the interview to the instructor and report out the results of the interview to the class (so you may want to bring a hard copy to class for your reference during presentation). Additional questions can be explored, but make sure to address the above topics.

- **Position Paper** (15 points) – The position paper, like the policy brief, is another key communication used in policy circles. It is often called a "white paper" and is more detailed than the policy brief, exploring more facets of the policy issue, going into greater analytical detail, and more strongly stating a clear position on the policy issue. The team will use raw material gathered from individual policy briefs being written by group members to flesh out arguments and counterarguments within the position paper. The paper will be 20 pages double-spaced and submitted to the instructor at the final presentation.
- **PowerPoint Slides** (8 points) – As a team, you will create visuals in the form of a PowerPoint slide deck to breathe life into the final presentation (20 slides). The visuals should highlight and complement what you have written about the policy issue in the position paper and the policy

briefs—they should not be a sound and light show that overshadows the point you are trying to make.

- **Final Presentation** (7 points for delivery) – Your team will present all final team policy recommendations in the context of your final presentation, in front of the professor. Your delivery as a team, quality of presentation material, and the strength of the presentation content will be the criteria for judging the overall presentation. The team’s presentation will last 25 minutes, plus 5 minutes for questions.

A note about what to include and how to submit your final materials:

- By the time of their final presentation, the team will place all final versions of documents created during the semester on Carmen for the instructor in the dropbox assigned to your team.
- Additionally, the team will provide on flash drive and one hard copy packet of materials highlighted in the presentation.
- You can package the final presentation items professionally so that they appear as a portfolio showcasing your work, either loose-leaf in a folder for easy pull-out viewing, or organized in a binder or spiral-bound booklet with tabbed sections.

Part 3: Individual Class Contribution

As already noted, attendance and participation in class is important. Students will receive one point for each regular class they attend and actively participate in (potential of 14 points).

For one of the class meeting times, the class will be held in a different format—as a communications lab where you can hone your skills. The **Team Lab** (2 points; replacing the class in Week 7) is a focused opportunity to work with your instructor and team to share your works in progress (i.e., drafts ready by date of the Team Writing Lab) and receive constructive criticism intended to improve the work as the semester progresses.

This lab is not optional. It is a critical component of the curriculum and is intended to hone your writing skills so that you demonstrate improvement from the start to the end of the semester. Not attending will make your in-class contribution grade from the instructor (15% of the final grade) suffer. Even more importantly, the quality of your final work will not benefit from this in-process review and discussion.

In addition to the normal class contribution and writing lab points, your contribution to the group effort will be assessed by each of your team members. This will also be factored into your final grade; you have the potential to earn 10 points based upon your team colleague evaluations.

COURSE POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT)

From: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coamfaqs.html#academicmisconductstatement>

The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's *Code of Student Conduct*, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty.

Failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's *Code of Student Conduct* may constitute "Academic Misconduct." Sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

In the Ohio State University's *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 3335-23-04 defines academic misconduct as: "Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process." Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University's *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an "excuse" for academic misconduct. Other sources of information on academic misconduct (integrity) to which you can refer include:

The Committee on Academic Misconduct web page:
<http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>

Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity:
<http://oaa.osu.edu/coamtensuggestions.html>

Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity:
www.northwestern.edu/uacc/8cards.html

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

DISABILITY SERVICES

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu>

ASSIGNMENTS

You will submit all assignments for the course via Carmen dropboxes (your individual or the team dropbox) before the beginning of class (Tuesdays at 3:30) on the assigned day. Some assignments will be critiqued in class; for these assignments, please bring a hard copy of the work.

Informing me of your intention to be absent does not waive your obligation to submit assigned work. **Late work will be accepted with a one-third-letter grade penalty each day that it is late (A- to B+).**

REQUIRED COURSE READING MATERIAL

This course textbook is a bookshelf item that will help to build your understanding of communications in the policy environment and be useful for reference during your career:

A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process
2nd or 3rd Edition
Catherine F. Smith
ISBN # 978-0-1999-3392-1

Students can access textbook information via the Barnes & Noble bookstore website: www.shopOhioState.com as well as from their BuckeyeLink Student Center. This information is disseminated by B&N to all area bookstores. You may buy from a store of your choice and/or shop for books (always use ISBN# for searches) on line.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1 (August 25) Getting to Know You

Lecture:

- Review of the course syllabus.
- Introduction to final project topics and teams. Each student will be assigned to a public policy project team based upon one area of interest.

In-Class-Activities:

- **Elevator Speeches** – Each student will give a 30-second self-introduction to a fellow student, who will critique the Elevator Speech. Each student will then hone their speech and introduce him or herself to the entire class.
- **Professional Bio Interview** – Each student will interview the same student they worked with on the Elevator Speech using the provided sample bios and collect content for writing the fellow student's Professional Bio.

Readings for Next Week:

From *A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process*:

- Chapter 1 – Public Policy Making
- Chapter 2 – Communication in the Process
- *Appendix B: Clear Writing (from 2nd Edition; on Carmen if you purchase 3rd Edition)*

Online resource:

- King, S. (2000). *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. New York: Scribner. Online excerpt on passive voice at http://www.westga.edu/~jsewell/King_Passive_Voice.pdf

Assignment Due Next Class:

- INDIVIDUAL – Professional Bio of team colleague interviewed during first class. Save on Carmen and bring a hard copy to class.

Week 2 (September 1) Making Your Point

Lecture:

- Communications planning.
- Writing well and with clarity.
- Deconstructing the policy brief.

In-Class Activity:

- INDIVIDUAL – Critique of class colleague’s Professional Bio.
- TEAM – Review of policy communications samples and critique for clarity. Discuss with class.

Readings for Next Week:

From *A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process*:

- Chapter 3 – Definition: Frame the Problem
- Chapter 4 – Evaluation: Analyze and Advise
- Chapter 5 – Legislative History: Know the Record

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 3 (September 8) Team Communications Exercise

In-Class Activity:

- TEAM – The class will involve an exercise where team members learn more about their leadership styles and how to work together most effectively.

Readings for Next Week:

From *A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process*:

- Chapter 6 – Position Paper: Know the Arguments
- Chapter 7 – Petitions and Proposals: Request Action or Propose Policy
- Chapter 8 – Briefing Memo or Opinion Statement: Inform Policy Makers

Assignment Due Next Class:

- TEAM – Background Interview Notes from session with policy project sponsor.

Week 4 (September 15) Backgrounding and Situation Analysis

Lecture:

- Defining and writing problem statements.
- Using message maps as a construct to organize your thoughts.
- Conducting background research and framing the issue.
- Writing position papers.

In-Class Activity:

- TEAM - Report-out to class on interview with project sponsor.

Readings for Next Week:

From *A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process*:

- Chapter 9 – Testimony: Witness in a Public Hearing
- Chapter 10 – Written Public Comment: Influence Administration
- Conclusion - Continuity and Change

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 5 (September 22) NO CLASS

Instead of this week's class, you will go to a legislative hearing to observe the process in action and send me an email message with a three-paragraph summary of your observations. This will count for your class participation grade for this week.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- INDIVIDUAL – Detailed Outline of Policy Brief (critiqued in next class by a team colleague). Save on Carmen and bring a hard copy to class.

Week 6 (September 29) Saying It Well

Lecture:

- Written testimony, hearing protocols and public commentary.
- Effectively presenting as a policy professional: tips on preparation, content, and delivery.

In-Class Activity:

- ALL – Give a 3 minute presentation to the class summarizing the hearing you attended and receive feedback on your delivery.
- TEAM – Meet as a group to review one another's Policy Brief Outlines. Present summary, status, and next steps to class.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 7 (October 6) Team Writing Lab

The Team Writing Lab is not optional. The instructor will dock in-class contribution points for any team member who chooses not to be present for all or part of the lab time. Student teams will sign up for one of these timeslots by Week 6 of the class.

The instructor will host team writing labs (30 minutes apiece) for each team in the class. The class as a whole will not meet during Week 7 of the class (October 6) in order to accommodate an opportunity to engage with teams to roll up sleeves together and refine written work in progress.

The labs with teams will be held during the regular class time during Week 7 of the class, and during office hour times that same week. Below is a summary of times:

Tuesday, October 6

5:45–6:15 p.m.

6:20–6:50 p.m.

6:55–7:25 p.m.

7:30–8:00 p.m.

Readings for Next Week (on Carmen):

- Sample media releases and advisory.
- Assigned readings on AP Style.
- Sample opinion pieces and news release.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 8 (October 13) Success with the News Media

Lecture:

- Media relations strategies and tactics, including advisories, releases, target lists, pitching, talking points, FAQs, online newsrooms.
- The role of opinion in media, including op-eds and letters to the editor.
- Discussion about the use of paid media (advertising) for public policy issues, and the prevalence of new media options for getting the word out.

In-Class Activity:

- TEAM – Write news release in class and present to the class (critiqued by class colleagues).

Assignment Due Next Class:

- INDIVIDUAL – Draft Policy Brief.

Week 9 (October 20) Communications in Meetings

Lecture:

- What happens before, during, and after the meeting?

- Shared ownership of meeting communications
- Communications as a time management tool

In-Class Activity:

- Scenario-based activity on meeting management.

Readings for Next Week:

- Sample ads for community fact-sharing (on Carmen).
- Sample myth-buster sheet (on Carmen).

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 10 (October 27) Engaging with Community Members

Lecture:

- Community relations strategies and tactics, including grassroots outreach, myth-busters, local events, and building reliable issues supports.
- Leveraging the Web and social media for community relations.

In-Class Activity:

- TEAM – Review and critique sample letters to the editor within teams and report out to class.

Readings for Next Week:

From *A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process*:

- *Appendix A: Public Policy Writing for the Web*

Articles on Carmen:

- *Who Leaves Comedy Central to Work for the Government?* by Suzy Khimm, September 7, 2012, Washington Post
- *Complaints pour into Consumer Financial Protection Bureau* by Kenneth R. Harney, July 8, 2015, Washington Post

Week 11 (November 3) Designing Elegantly Simple Websites

Lecture:

- Information architecture and user interface design for the Web.
- Crafting wireframes.
- Writing copy for the Web.
- Using content maps to organize Web copy.

In-Class Activity:

- Teams work with materials provided by instructor to mock up microsite.

Readings for Next Week:

- [Tuftes PowerPoint case study sample.](#)

- Tufte information design/visual display of information excerpt (on Carmen).
- Sample coherence models and infographics (on Carmen).

Assignment Due Next Class:

- Bring an infographic of your choice and be prepared to discuss why you think it is a powerful communications tool.

Week 12 (November 10) Harnessing Information Design

Lecture:

- Review Tufte's PowerPoint case studies on PowerPoint misuse, information design/data visualization in general, the cholera epidemic, and others to demonstrate how smart information design can organize an overwhelming amount of information or data.
- Discuss the benefits of information design and its application to Web design and presentations.

In-Class Activity:

- Discuss information design readings and infographics.

Readings for Next Week (on Carmen):

- Videos to watch.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 13 (November 17) Storytelling with Videos

Lecture:

- Discuss how an integrated communications approach incorporating video can be a compelling call to action.
- Review the video production process, from creative brief to video capture and editing.
- Discuss other communications that complement video, such as a facilitation guide for broad dissemination and engagement.

In-Class Activity:

- Guest speaker on video.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 14 (November 24) Optional Team Writing Lab

This **Optional Team Lab** is an additional opportunity to work with your instructor and team to share your works in progress and receive constructive criticism intended to improve the work as the semester nears completion.

The labs with teams will be held during the regular class time during Week 14 of the class, and during office hour times that same week. Below is a summary of times:

Tuesday, November 24

5:45–6:15 p.m.
6:20–6:50 p.m.
6:55–7:25 p.m.
7:30–8:00 p.m.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 15 (December 1) Optional Individual Writing Lab

This **Optional Individual Lab** is a focused opportunity to work with your instructor to share your works in progress and receive constructive criticism intended to improve your written work as the semester nears completion.

The lab will be held during the regular class time during Week 15 of the class, and during office hour times that same week. Below is a summary of times, which are available to the first 10 students to sign-up:

Tuesday, December 1

5:45–6:00 p.m.
6:00–6:15 p.m.
6:15–7:00 p.m.
7:00–7:15 p.m.
7:15–7:30 p.m.
7:30–7:45 p.m.
7:45–8:00 p.m.
8:00–8:15 p.m.
8:15–8:45 p.m.
8:45–9:00 p.m.

Assignment Due Next Class:

- NONE

Week 16 (December 8) Measuring Your Success

Lecture:

- Case study presentations on effective policy communications approaches with quantifiable metrics.

In-Class Activity:

- TEAM - Each team will conduct an abbreviated dry run of their presentation with one other team. Colleagues will critique one another to help prepare for final presentation.
- POTLUCK DINNER!

Assignment Due for Final Project on Dec. 16:

Compilation of all final project deliverables, including:

- INDIVIDUAL - Final Policy Brief
- TEAM - Position Paper
- TEAM - PowerPoint Slides and Presentation

FINAL PRESENTATIONS (Wednesday, Dec. 16, 8-10:15 p.m.)

30 minutes total per team

TIMESLOT FOR YOUR TEAM TBD

8:00–8:30 p.m.

8:35–9:05 p.m.

9:10–9:40 p.m.

9:45–10:15 p.m.

SAMPLE

SAMPLE