PPHA 36600: Writing for Public Policy Professionals

Fall 2020: Coronavirus Edition

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Course Description:

The central question this course will try to answer is: *What makes public policy writing truly matter?* We will focus, in turn, on exploring various writing tools, techniques, and strategies that have been used to effect change in policy areas as diverse as social justice, health, education, and climate change—in the United States and around the world. Through interactive discussions and exercises and small-group work, students will also become familiar with strategies for identifying and overcoming common policy writing challenges. At the end of the quarter, students will emerge empowered with the skills they need to translate the results of rigorous policy analysis into policy stories that matter. **Students will also have the opportunity to submit their writing, if appropriate, for inclusion in an edited collection on policing and public health policy I am preparing for Johns Hopkins University Press.** This course will be grounded in five habitual practices:

1. **Writing:** In nearly every class meeting, students will either produce or revise a piece of writing, ranging from short documents to a final, longer work of policy analysis.
2. **Reading:** Prior to each class meeting, students will need to read and review selected articles, book chapters, sample policy documents, and other on-line resources related to policy writing techniques and processes, rhetorical theory, and effective writing strategies. Students will need to demonstrate their ability to consider critically the motives and methods of the authors and distinguish opinions and beliefs from researched claims and evidence.

3. **Feedback:** Students will receive extensive and consistent feedback on their writing from me and from their peers. We will devote class time to discussing the qualities of good writing, and students will work together to define standards for their own writing. Because I believe all first drafts are crappy—even the ones I write—students will be provided with several opportunities to draft and revise.

4. **Small-Group Work:** Throughout the course, students will work in small groups to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of policy stories, revise them, and edit them to meet the unique needs of the intended audience. These groups will meet with me on a regular basis—as opposed to one-on-one coaching sessions, which risk devolving into "fix it" sessions. Reading three or four papers at the same time will help us better determine what works (and what doesn't). Students will also be asked to meet outside of class to read, diagnose, and respond to each other's writing.

5. **Classroom Interaction:** This course will be run as a student-driven graduate seminar. Rather than simply reviewing the ideas presented in readings and impassively receiving content through lectures, students will lead discussion, instruct their peers, and collaborate with me as much as possible. As a class, we will practice applying the lessons we learn to the kinds of writing challenges policy analysts will encounter in the real world.

Note: This course assumes proficiency in English. While basic elements of grammar and usage will be discussed, as appropriate, this course is not intended to replace English Language Learning resources available to University of Chicago graduate students.

Weekly Course Schedule:

This course will be taught 100% online. There will be **NO** in-person interaction.

We will meet for live, asynchronous class on Wednesdays from 3:30-4:50 pm CST via Zoom. During these sessions, I will begin by answering questions and expanding on the week's lessons, if necessary. We will dedicate a majority of the time to writing and editing exercises,

small-group work, and other interactive activities. While all live, asynchronous classes will be recorded and posted on our Canvas page, attendance and respectful participation is mandatory (see "Assignments and Grading" below for more details).

All assignments will be due on Mondays and will need to be submitted through the class Canvas page. Also on Mondays, students will have access to new recorded lectures and skill-development videos, as well as the required readings for the week.

I will plan to hold office hours on Thursday and Friday each week via Zoom during times that are convenient for students. I will also create a Slack channel for this course. That will be the easiest way to get in touch with me. Students can also feel free to email me.

The topics we'll cover in this course include:

Week	Topic Covered & Assignments Due
1 Sep 29-Oct 3	• First Things First: Understanding Audience & Purpose • The Three Types of Policy Stories
2 Oct 4-10	• Developing Policy Stories Using Human Centered Design
3 Oct 11-17	• Structuring Policy Memos and Briefs for Maximum Impact • Introduction to Op-Ed Writing
4 Oct 18-24	• Writing for the Reader Part I: Deductive and Unified Paragraphs • Writing for the Reader Part II: Coherent Paragraphs • **First Draft of Policy Brief Due**
5 Oct 25-31	• Writing for the Reader Part III: Clear and Concise Sentences • People-First Language • Strategies for Ruthlessly Pruning Needless Words
6 Nov 1-7	• How to Haunt Your Reader • Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Citing Sources Properly • **First Draft of Policy Memo Due**

Week	Topic Covered & Assignments Due
7 Nov 8-14	• Epistemological Modesty vs. Revolutionary Change in Public Policy
8 Nov 15-21	• Data Visualization: Making Figures, Tables, and Charts Matter • **First Draft of Solutions Narrative Due**
9 Nov 22-28	• Being Your Own Best Editor
10 Nov 29-Dec 5	• No class meeting • **Final Portfolios Due**

Required Text:

Public Policy Writing That Matters by David Chrisinger, published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2017 (ISBN: 9781421422268).

All other required readings will be posted for download on our Canvas page.

Learning Outcomes

By committing to the rigorous process of reading, writing, discussing, collaborating, and rewriting, students who complete this course will be able to demonstrate their ability to:

• Read actively to understand and test the author's claims, opinions, and evidence.

• Generate research questions that are complex and nuanced enough to allow for inquiry and discovery, not just summary and illustration.

• Write engaging and compelling policy stories based on analysis and synthesis that provide relevant, useful, and persuasive recommendations to address root causes of policy challenges or issues.

- Develop sound strategies to cogently structure policy stories—using various conventions of logic, syntax, and formatting—that anticipate the audience's needs and expectations.
- Distinguish between substantive revision and surface editing; practice both; and rethink and reshape their writing based on their audience and purpose.
- Assess their peers' work to provide useful commentary on matters ranging from content to structure, evidence to grammar and style.

Assignments and Grading:

Assignments in this course will be "scaffolded," meaning they will be structured to afford students the opportunity to build on their skills and capabilities throughout the quarter, culminating in a final article (and a portfolio of policy writing).

- **Writing Assignments:** Each student will write a (1) **Policy Brief** that details what available evidence and research tells us about a given policy challenge; (2) **Policy Memo** that synthesizes the policy brief into a clear and concise case for a specific policy recommendation; and (3) what I call a **"Solutions Narrative"** that tells a story related to the policy challenge supported and informed by the evidence, research, and policy recommendation(s) presented in the policy brief and memo. Students will also have the opportunity to write op-eds and other types of policy communication.
- **Peer Review Debriefs:** Students will be required to meet with their peer-review groups on a regular basis, per my instructions. At the end of each meeting, students will prepare a debrief of what they discussed and what actions will be taken as a result of the meeting. Students will also be required to submit what I call "revision memos" detailing how they will address feedback on their writing provided by me and their peers.
- **Writing Skill Quizzes:** Students will be required to complete low-stakes quizzes for each of the skill-development videos that will be posted each Monday.
- **Lectures:** No one will be penalized for missing up to two live, asynchronous class sessions. We all get sick, experience family emergencies, or need to take time away for

religious observances. Please let me know if you need to be absent more than twice so we can discuss possible ways to make it up. Attendance and participation will not count for more than 10 percent of the final grade, so it is possible for students to miss many live, asynchronous classes and still pass the class—as long as they participate in their small-group discussions and complete all writing assignments.

Late Assignment Policy:

The late penalty is one grade level per day (A- to a B+). I can waive the penalty if you have a timely, legitimate, and documented excuse. If you are missing classes or have a late assignment because of sickness or religious observance, I can accommodate you.

If possible, please alert me by email in advance of being late on an assignment to make specific arrangements for extensions. It is much easier to accommodate timely requests. Please do not wait until weeks after a missed assignment to reach out to me. I especially advise against waiting to contact me until the last week of classes or after final grades have been submitted.

Re-Grading Policy:

Feel free to discuss your grades with me at any time. If, following such a conversation, you feel that an error was made, please submit a re-grade request to me by email, within two weeks of the assignment being handed back. Please include an explanation or justification for the re-grade request.

Do not simply lobby non-specifically for a better grade, or tell a story about how there is some reason you need to maintain a certain grade level. It's far more effective to substantively discuss why you thought your work was effective and why you feel your grade did not accurately reflect that. If a mistake was made, I will correct it.

Pass/Fail Policies:

Students can request to take this course pass/fail. Students must use the [Harris Pass/Fail request form](#) and must meet the Harris deadline, which is generally 9:00 am CST on the Monday of the 5th week of courses. I retain the right to deny a student's pass/fail request if the student has not met performance or attendance standards. Students who are approved to take the course pass/fail must turn in all assignments, attend class meetings, and meet all other course requirements.

Online Seminar Guidelines, Etiquette, and Expectations:

We all will be attending class from home. Interruptions from pets and children, as well as other distractions are the new normal. Please don't worry if you're ever the cause of an interruption. It's fine! I know I won't be able to guarantee that one of my kids won't interrupt me during class from time to time. In addition, I expect you to:

- Sign into your UChicago Zoom account with your full name so I can keep track of attendance.
- Keep your video on, if possible. It's much easier for me when I can see your face and how you are reacting to the material being discussed. Having your videos on will also make your breakout discussions more engaging. Some of you may be worried about showing your messy apartments, or your bad hair day, or whatever. Please don't worry. We're all human, and I'm sure we're all doing our best to cope in these very strange times. Whatever your situation is, having your video on and your face visible is preferable to a static image or a black box.
- Avoid using distracting backgrounds or other special effects.

This plan, of course, can (and probably will) change as we gain experience together and determine as a group what is working and what isn't.

Managing Any Disruptions That May Arise:

I'm committed to helping everyone pass this course in a way that ensures you learn the materials and get the work done. That said, my students' safety and wellbeing is more important than anything going on in class. If you find yourself unable to complete an assignment because of illness or other personal reasons, here's what I suggest: As soon as possible, students should email me and copy their academic advisor with a note about the missed work and an explanation. I hold everything in the strictest confidence. We will work together to find a way for students to make up missed assignments.

Any student who faces challenges securing food or housing or personal safety should notify me—if you are comfortable in doing so. If I cannot help, I will connect you with someone who can. Students can also reach out to their academic advisor and the Dean of Students, Kate Shannon Biddle, for support.

Please Don't Plagiarize:

All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic Integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another's work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage.

What is plagiarism?

"Simply put, plagiarism is using words and thoughts of others as if they were your own. Any time you borrow from an original source and do not give proper credit, you have committed plagiarism," according to the University of Chicago's [Office of International Affairs](#). "While there are different degrees and types of plagiarism, plagiarism is not just about honesty, it is also a violation of property law and is illegal."

Furthermore, "It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work," according to the University of Chicago's policies and regulations on academic honesty and plagiarism.

What are the consequences if students are caught plagiarizing?

In addition to earning a grade of 0 on the assignment (and no higher than a B- in the course, regardless of performance on other assignments), students will also be reported to the Dean of Students and may be punished under the University of Chicago's discipline procedures, which "can result in sanctions that severely disrupt or even end your studies at the University."

The Harris School's policies related to academic integrity and dishonesty can be found on this page. Harris's specific procedures for handling suspected violations of these policies are available in the section *Harris Procedures for Allegations of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty*.

If a student has been found in violation of academic honesty and does not believe that either the finding or the sanction is fair or correct, the student has the right to appeal the finding by requesting a hearing from the Area Disciplinary Committee. More information about the Area Disciplinary Committee is available here.

How to Avoid Unintentional Plagiarism:

After all my years of teaching writing, I've come to believe that the vast majority of incidents related to plagiarism are unintentional. The best way to avoid unintentional plagiarism is to keep good notes of your sources so that you do not forget where a piece of information comes from. The University of Chicago has created several resources you may want to consult regarding citation management:

- Citing Resources: A detailed guide to citation from the University of Chicago Library. Includes instructions on locating and using major citation manuals and style guides, as well as information about using RefWorks bibliographic management tool.

- [RefWorks](#): RefWorks is a web-based bibliographic management tool provided by the University of Chicago Library that makes creating bibliographies and citing resources quick and easy. The Library's RefWorks' web site links to information about classes and extensive online tutorials, as well as help guides on keeping organized and citing resources using RefWorks' Write-N-Cite feature.
- [Citation Management](#): A helpful guide on how to use RefWorks and other citation management tools, including EndNote and Zotero.

In short, I expect you to properly acknowledge the source material you consulted— whether that's by using direct quotations or paraphrases—with proper citations according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Disability Accommodations

The University's policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). Students who have disability accommodations awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office should inform the Harris Dean of Students office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the students' accommodations implementation.

Harris students are not required to submit their accommodations letter to the instructor. Students from other divisions in the University must submit their accommodations letter to either the instructor or the Harris Dean of Students Office.

Students who do not yet have formal accommodations in place but who feel they need accommodations on a temporary or ongoing basis should contact the Harris Dean of Students Office or Student Disability Services.

Diversity and Inclusion

The Harris School welcomes, values, and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, and we believe that rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the expression and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions. The University and the Harris School have developed distinct but overlapping principles and guidelines to insure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all.

- The University's policies are available here. Specifically, the University identifies the freedom of expression as being "vital to our shared goal of the pursuit of knowledge, as is the right of all members of the community to explore new ideas and learn from one another. To preserve an environment of spirited and open debate, we should all have the opportunity to contribute to intellectual exchanges and participate fully in the life of the University."

- The Harris School's commitments to lively, principled, and respectful engagement are available here: "Consistent with the University of Chicago's commitment to open discourse and free expression, Harris encourages members of the leadership, faculty, student body, and administrative staff to respect and engage with others of differing backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial." We foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members not only to speak freely about all issues but also to listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others.