THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Harris Public Policy

PPHA 36630

Trauma-Informed Policy Communication:
Writing Effectively about War, Catastrophe & Crisis

Winter 2020

Tuesdays, 5:00-7:50 pm – Keller 2112

Student Hours with David Chrisinger: TBD

The central question this course will try to address is: *How can we best tell policy stories that can help people see the humanity in each other?* We will analyze various texts and explore different tools, techniques, and frameworks to help you write effectively about what I call the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Policy Problems"; that is: anything related to the biblical Four Horsemen: Conquest, War, Famine, and Death.

Through pre-recorded mini-lessons, interactive discussions, guided in-class exercises, and small-group work, you will learn promising strategies to help you communicate accurately and persuasively about social justice issues, pandemics, war, genocide, climate change, violence against women, extreme poverty, gun violence, and many other iterations of catastrophe and crisis. Because this sort of work comes with many difficult challenges—and important responsibilities, our primary concerns during class will include:

- The ethical treatment of survivors of trauma.
- The impact—both positive and negative—writing about trauma has on readers.
- How to work within the confines of survivor testimony and memory.
- How to research and communicate important findings effectively under stress.
- How to write about trauma in a way that leads to connection and understanding.
- Understanding and addressing the psychological hazards that can come with researching and writing about trauma.

While we as policy analysts and communicators can't necessarily *make* the world more peaceful and just with our words alone, we absolutely *can* control how well we write about trauma and catastrophe to ensure our stories can resonate with those who need it most and persuade those with the power to do something about it. In this course, we will explore how to do just that.

This course will be grounded in 5 habitual practices:

1. **Writing:** In nearly every class, students will either produce or revise a piece of writing, ranging from brief documents to a final, longer work of policy analysis.

2. **Reading:** Prior to each class, students will need to read and review selected articles, book chapters, sample policy documents, and other resources related to policy writing techniques and processes, rhetorical theory, and effective writing strategies. Students will need to show their ability to consider critically the motives and methods of the authors and distinguish opinions from researched claims.

3. **Feedback:** Students will receive extensive and consistent feedback on their writing. We will devote class time to discussing the qualities of good writing, and students will work together to define standards for their own writing. 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 reader. I will also ask that you meet outside of class to read, diagnose, and respond to each other's writing.

5. **Classroom Interaction:** This course operates like 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.

Learning Outcomes:

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

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

- Write engaging and persuasive policy stories about traumatic and catastrophic events and topics based on analysis and synthesis that provide relevant, useful, and persuasive recommendations to address the root causes of relevant policy challenges or issues.

- Develop sound strategies to structure policy stories about traumatic and catastrophic events and topics in anticipation of the reader'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.
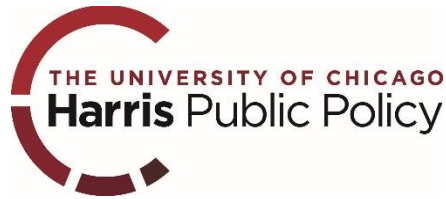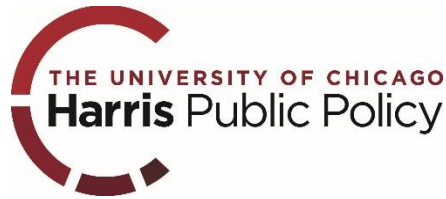
Assignments:

- **Communication Strategy Analysis and Class Presentation:**
  - Students will select a traumatic or catastrophic event or topic and find one policy report that covers it. Regarding the communication strategy, students will analyze the report's communication strategy for what's working, what isn't, and why. They will then share their findings with the class in a short presentation.

- **Practitioner Interview and Class Presentation**
  - Students will find a policy advocate, researcher, or journalist who has covered a traumatic or catastrophic event or topic and discuss that person's reactions to the work, how they conduct their research, what writing strategies they use most often, and any best practices they've developed over the course of their careers. They will then share their findings with the rest of the class.

- **Personal Trauma-Writing Guide**
  - Students will create their own guidebook of at least 10 effective strategies to use when writing about trauma. Over the course of the quarter, we will explore many different tools, techniques, frameworks, and strategies; as we do, take note of strategies that resonate with you. The guidebook you submit to me will need to include specific "rules" you plan to follow, based on evidence, with examples from the real world. Once you leave Harris, you'll have this handy guidebook to reference whenever you need to write about such delicate topics.

- **Solutions Narrative (1,500-2,000 words)**
  - Solutions narratives tell stories about people in the real world who are affected by trauma and about people who are working to do something about it. When readers acknowledge there's a problem—but don't know what can be done about it—they can be left feeling powerless or fatalistic. Moreover, the last thing most readers need is *more* data. What we need are *better* stories about responses to policy issues to empower ourselves and others and heighten accountability.

- **Optional: Personal Essay (1,000 words)**
  - In this course, students will be taught how to write about people—themselves first, other people second. During class, you will be led through a series of exercises designed to help you find a personal story you can use to advance a policy reform, network, and advance in your career. I will not require anyone to submit what they've written in class for a grade. For those who are interested, I may be able to help such essays get published once the course ends.

Course Expectations

Late Assignments:

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. 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 I make a mistake, rest assured that I will own up to it, correct it, and try not to make the same mistake again.

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 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:
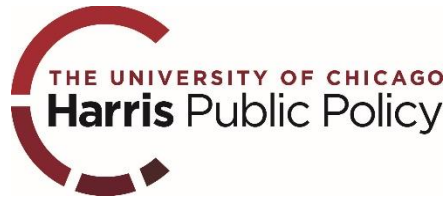
- Sign into your UChicago Zoom account with your full name so I can keep track of attendance.
- Keep your video on as long as you're comfortable. While I do not require you to have your video on during live sessions, it's much easier for me when I can see your face and how you are reacting to the material 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.
- Avoid using distracting backgrounds or other special effects.

## Recording and Deletion Policies for Academic Year 2020-2021:

The Recording and Deletion Policies for the current academic year can be found in the Student Manual under [Petitions, Audio & Video Recording on Campus](). Here are the highlights:

- Do not record, share, or disseminate any course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats.
- Do not share links for the course to those not currently enrolled.
- Any Zoom cloud recordings will be automatically deleted 90 days after the completion of the recording.

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.
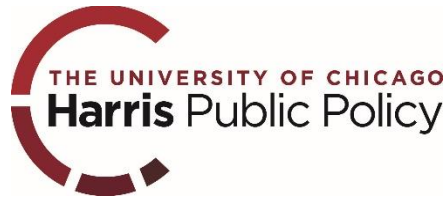
Please Don't Plagiarize:

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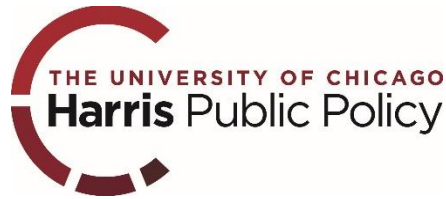
- Citing Resources: A detailed guide to citation from the University of Chicago Library. Includes instructions on locating and using major citation manuals and style guides, as well as information about using RefWorks bibliographic management tool.
- RefWorks: RefWorks is a web-based bibliographic management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

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*.

Accessibility

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000

Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

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 ensure 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
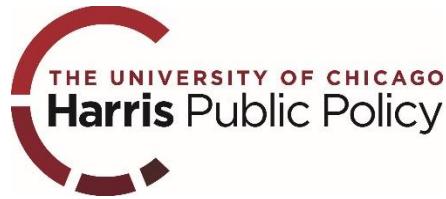
the right of all members of the community to explore new ideas and learn from one another. To preserve an environment of spirited and open debate, we should all have the opportunity to contribute to intellectual exchanges and participate fully in the life of the University."

- 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.

UChicago Health Pact:

All students on campus are required to adhere to the guidelines in the UChicago Health Pact to promote a safe environment in the classroom:

- Secure face coverings must be worn appropriately at all times while in University buildings.
- Maintain a distance of 6 feet from others.
- Do not attend an in-person class if you feel unwell or are experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms.

The complete text of the UChicago Health Pact along with additional information about COVID-19 protocols can be found here.

Reporting COVID-19 Related Concerns:

Any concerns over inappropriate PPE usage, physical distancing, cleaning/disinfection, or other COVID-19 related public health concerns should be directed to UCAIR.

If there is an emergency, call 773-702-8181 or dial 123 on any campus phone.

Reporting COVID-19 Exposure or a Confirmed Case:

If you were potentially exposed to COVID-19 or your COVID-19 test results come back positive, reach out immediately to C19HealthReport@uchicago.edu.