PPHA 36630

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

Winter 2024: Mondays, 9:00-11:50 am (Keller 2112)

Student Hours with David Chrisinger: By Appointment (Zoom or Keller 1013-A)

Course TA: Megan Sanders (msanders22@uchicago.edu)

Optional TA Discussion Section: By Appointment (Zoom or Keller TBD)

The central question this course will try to address is: *How might we best tell policy stories that help our readers see the humanity in each other?* Throughout the course, we will explore promising tools, techniques, and frameworks that can help us do just that. Whether you're interested in writing about social justice, the pandemic, war, genocide, climate change, violence against women, extreme poverty, gun violence, or some other catastrophe or crisis, we can control how well we write to ensure the stories we tell not only resonate with those who need to read them most but also persuade those with the power to do something meaningful in response.

The writing tools we will cover in this course fall into one of three categories:

1. **Nuts and Bolts**: Tools for making meaning and creating connection at the paragraph, sentence, and individual word levels.
2. **Blueprints**: Frameworks for organizing and building effective evidence-based policy narratives that meet the unique needs of the intended audience.
3. **Special Effects**: Strategies to best structure policy narratives to ensure they are as clear, concise, and compelling as possible.

Besides addressing the question above, we will also test a theory I have about the world: The essence of tragedy is the *expectation* of catastrophe. Refusing to expect catastrophe as inevitable is the best way I have found to help make the world a bit more habitable. As long as there are storytellers willing to document with integrity what they know to be true, and as long as they use what they know to be true to stand up against violence and dehumanization, I believe we stand a fighting chance to contribute something positive and useful to the world.

Learning Outcomes:

By committing to the rigorous process of reading, discussing, writing, and rewriting, students who complete this course will be better positioned to:

- Discern the differences between more and less effective communication approaches and/or styles in public policy.
- Recognize the relationship between power and influence and develop sound strategies to structure policy narratives in anticipation of the audience's expectations.
- Define the limits and ethical constraints of persuasion as they apply to bias, belief, attitude, and moral foundations.
- Use a human-centered approach to ask better research questions, organize evidence efficiently, and frame narratives to meet the unique needs of the intended audience.
- Read actively to understand and test an author's claims, evidence, and opinions.
- Write persuasive policy narratives based on original analysis and synthesis that provide valuable recommendations to address the root causes of pressing policy challenges.
- Distinguish between substantive revision and surface editing; practice both and rethink and reshape their writing based on audience and purpose.
- Assess their peers' writing and provide useful feedback on matters ranging from content to structure and evidence to grammar.

Week 1	Friday, January 5
Topic:	**Introduction to Trauma-Informed Policy Communication**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Understanding Trauma and Its Impact on Individuals and Communities • Introduction to the Principles of Clear and Effective Communication Exercises: • Defining Trauma for Public Policy Communication Purposes • Research Statement Starters • Abstraction "Plussing"
Readings:	Required: • "Trauma: Assault on an Essential Human System," by Roger Simpson and William Coté, *Covering Violence* • "This Conversation Will Change How You Think about Trauma," *The Ezra Klein Show* (2021) *Listen to podcast and/or read the transcript) • Foreword and Introduction, *Stories Are What Save Us*
Assignments:	Research Statement with Key Questions **(Due Week 2)** Personal Policy Writing Style Guide **(Due Finals Week)**

Week 2	Monday, January 8
Topic:	**Putting People Center Stage**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Case Study: Family Separation at the Southern Border • Three Types of Policy Research Questions Exercise: • Mapping Key Stakeholders in Family Separation at the Southern Border Guest Speaker: • Meredith MacKenzie de Silva, West End Strategy
Readings:	Required: • "We Need to Take Away Children," by Caitlin Dickerson, *Atlantic* (2022) • "Families Separated at Border by Trump Reach Settlement," by Miriam Jordan, *New York Times* (2023) • Chapters 1-2, *Public Policy Writing That Matters*
Assignments:	Screenshot of Key Stakeholder Map & Reflection **(Due Week 3)**

Week 3	Friday, January 19
Topic:	**How to Tell a Personal Story to Build Solidarity and Advocate for Change**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Aristotle's Dramatic Arc & the 5 Essential Elements of Storytelling Exercises: • Mapping out the 5 Essential Elements in Policy Narratives • Finding Personal Stories in the Transformation Inventory • Uncovering the Object of Desire • Starting with One True Thing
Readings:	Required: • Chapters 1-2, 5 & 9, *Stories Are What Save Us* Recommended: • "Personal Narratives Build Trust across Ideological Divides," by David Hagmann, et al. (2021)
Assignments:	Personal Advocacy Narrative **(Due Week 4)**

Week 4	Monday, January 22
Topic:	**Making More Persuasive Policy Recommendations**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Case Study: Making Persuasive Policy Recommendations from the Scene • Four Elements of a Persuasive Policy Recommendation • Framing the Outlook with Prospect Theory • Three Types of Policy Recommendations Exercises: • Using Affinity Clustering to Organize Evidence • Using the Importance/Difficulty Matrix to Make More Strategic Recommendations Guest Speaker: • Brian Castner, Amnesty International
Readings:	Required: • "Afghanistan: Taliban's cruel attacks in Panjshir province amount to war crime of collective punishment – new report," Amnesty International (2023) • "Afghanistan: 'Your sons are in the mountains': The collective punishment of civilians in Panjshir by the Taliban," Amnesty International (2023) • Chapters 4 & 6, *Public Policy Writing That Matters* Recommended: • "Gaslighting an Entire Nation," by Brian Castner, *New York Times* (2019) • Chapter 4, *Stories Are What Save Us*

Assignments:	Draft Policy Decision Memo, with Reader Profile **(Due Week 5)**

Week 5	Monday, January 29
Topic:	**How to Tell Other People's Stories to Expose Wrongdoing, Correct the Record, or Raise a Sense of Urgency**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Four Types of Policy Storytellers • Variation on the Arc: Stick-Figure Structure & Kurt Vonnegut's "Shapes of Stories" Exercise: • Mapping Someone Else's Story Using Vonnegut's "Man-in-Hole" Guest Speaker: • Phil Klay, author of *Uncertain Ground*
Readings:	Required: • "After War, a Failure of the Imagination," by Phil Klay (2014) • "Public Rage Won't Solve Any of Our Problems," by Phil Klay (2018) • "Can the Trauma of War Lead to Growth, Despite the Scars?" by Phil Klay (2020) • Chapters 5 & 12, *Public Policy Writing That Matters* Recommended: • The Six Main Arcs in Storytelling, as Identified by an A.I.," by Adrienne LaFrance, *Atlantic* (2016) • "The Army Medic in the Hole," by David Chrisinger, *The War Horse* (2020)
Assignments:	Draft Policy Solution Narrative, with Reader Profile **(Due Week 7)**

| Week 6	Monday, February 5
Topic:	**Mastering the Interview**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Mastering the Before, During, and After an Interview • Gathering Information Effectively and Ethically (and Sensitively) Exercises: • Practice: Trauma-Informed Interviewing • Mining Interviews for Insights and Effective Quotes Guest Speaker: • Mareike Schomerus, Busara Center for Behavioral Economics

Readings:	Required: • "Am I an Animal? Identity, Rules, and Loss in the Lord's Resistance Army," by Mareike Schomerus, *The Lord's Resistance Army* • "How to Conduct a Good Interview," by Annettee Lareau, *Listening to People* Recommended: • "The Interview: Assault or Catharsis?" by Roger Simpson and William Coté, *Covering Violence* • "Putting It All Together: Telling Your Story and Making Your Case," by Kathleen Gerson and Sarah Damaske, *The Science and Art of Interviewing*

Week 7	Monday, February 12
Topic:	**Combating Psychic Numbing with Human-Centered Narratives**
Agenda:	Lecture & Discussion: • Questions to Ask about the Reader • Analyzing Audiences Using the Moral Foundations Theory • Case Study: John Hersey's "Hiroshima" Exercise: • Combating Desensitization in John Hersey's "Hiroshima" • Creating an Effective Reader Profile
Readings:	Required: • "Hiroshima," by John Hersey, *New Yorker* (1946) • "John Hersey Uncovers the Horror," by Lesley M.M. Blume, *American Heritage* (2023) • "Psychic Numbing and Genocide," by Paul Slovic, *Judgment and Decision Making* (2007) • "What Happened to Empathy?" by Xochitl Gonzalez, *The Atlantic* (2023) Recommended: • "Moral Foundations Theory: The Pragmatic Validity of Moral Pluralism," by Jonathan Haidt, et al., *Advances in Experimental Psychology* (2012) • "What's Wrong with Moral Foundations Theory, and How to Get Moral Psychology Right," by Oliver Scott Curry, *Behavioral Scientist* (2019)

Week 8	Monday, February 19
Topic:	**The "New" Objectivity: Precision, Sensitivity & Transparency**
Agenda:	<u>Lecture & Discussion:</u> • Clear, Concise & Compelling Paragraphs and Sentences • Demystifying Punctuation <u>Exercise:</u> • Case Study: Uncovering the Root Causes of Gang Violence in Chicago <u>Guest Speaker:</u> • Dr. Brian Williams, author of *The Bodies Keep Coming*
Readings:	<u>Required:</u> • "The Problem with Chicago's Gang-Centric Violence Narrative," by Lakeidra Chavis, *The Trace* (2021) • Introduction to *The Bodies Keep Coming* by Dr. Brian Wiliams • Chapters 7-10, *Public Policy Writing That Matters* • Chapter 7, *Stories Are What Save Us* <u>Recommended:</u> • "Winning arguments: Interaction dynamics and persuasion strategies in good-faith online discussions," by Chenhau Tan, et al. (2016) • "Signaling the Trustworthiness of Science," by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, et al., *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019)
Assignments:	Final Portfolio **(Due Finals Week)**

Week 9	Monday, February 26
Topic:	**Writing about Sexual Violence, Suicide, and Other Sensitive Policy Topics**
Agenda:	<u>Lecture & Discussion:</u> • Ethical Considerations and Best Practices for Communicating about Sensitive Policy Topics • Interviewing a Survivor of Sexual Violence <u>Exercise:</u> • Writing Ethically and Effectively about Sensitive Public Policy Topics <u>Guest Speakers:</u> • Andrea Renee Sandoval Rathbun • Sadia Ali Heil
Readings:	<u>Required:</u> • "He Used a Position of Power, in a Time of War, to Get What he Wanted," by Andrea Renee Sandoval Rathbun, *The War Horse* (2022)
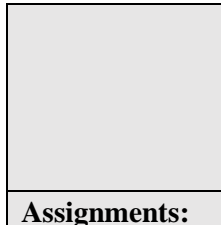
	• "The Pornography Trap: How Not to Write about Rape," by Jina Moore, *Columbia Journalism Review* (2011) • "The Country We Loved Didn't Love Us Back. Maybe This Time Would Be Different," by Sadia Ali Heil, *The War Horse* (2023)
Assignments:	Final Portfolio **(Due March 4)**

Finals Week: Monday, March 4 – Saturday, March 9

Students will need to submit a Final Portfolio on Monday, March 4 that includes:

1. **Personal Advocacy Narrative**
   • 1,000-word essay that draws from your personal life experience to advocate for policy change
2. **Policy Decision Memo – Analysis of Proposed Policy Reform (with Reader Profile)**
   • 2-3-page memo that helps the intended reader make an informed decision on whether to support a specific policy reform.
3. **Policy Solution Narrative (with Reader Profile)**
   • 1,500-word article that tells the story of people who are affected by trauma and those who are working to do something about it to not only educate and empower readers, but also heighten accountability.
4. **Personal Policy Writing Style Guide**
   • Throughout the course, students will add 10 writing tools, frameworks, and strategies to communicate effectively as a policy analyst and leader into a personal style guide. More than a simple list of "rules," students will be required to name the tool, describe when and how to use it, and provide an example of how it was used effectively.

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Social Impact, Down to a Science

How You Will Be Evaluated:

Criteria	Novice = 4	Proficient = 6	Distinguished = 8	Master = 10
Audience & Purpose	Appropriate audience not clearly identified and insuffient awareness of purpose. Problem not addressed.	Shows limited awareness of appropriate audience and purpose. Problem addressed but not solved.	Shows general awareness of appropriate audience and purpose. Problem addressed/potentially solved but needs more.	Audience and purpose are clear throughout. Problem solved.
Coherence & Organization	Executive Summary / Inciting Event is confusingly worded/ineffective. Writing lacks logical organization. Shows little coherence.	Executive Summary / Inciting Event contains some elements of a policy finding. Writing is mostly coherent and organized. Some points are misplaced or irrelevant.	Executive Summary / Inciting Event contains most elements of a policy finding. Writing is coherent and logically organized with deductive structure, and transitions are used between ideas and paragraphs. All points are relevant to central idea	Executive summary/Inciting Event contains all required elements and tells a story. Writing shows attention to logic and reasoning, as well as audience interest. Writing clearly leads the reader through the key findings in a logical, persuasive way.
Content	Shows some elements of a policy finding, but most ideas are underdeveloped. Caveats and alternative viewpoints are not considered. Data presented do not advance the argument.	Shows most elements of a policy finding, and ideas are more developed. Caveats and alternative viewpoints are mentioned but not rebutted. Data presented are interesting but not easy to connect to the story.	Shows all elements of a policy finding and develops ideas with appropriate and sufficient evidence. Caveats and alternative viewpoints are presented and rebutted, but the writing could be stronger. Data presented are easy to understand and advance the story.	Shows all elements of a policy finding and clear synthesis of ideas, in-depth analysis, and evidences original thought and support. Caveats and alternative viewpoints are recognized and rebutted convincingly. Data presented are easily understood, advance the argument, and are persuasive.
Development	Main points lack detailed development. Ideas are vague with little evidence of critical thinking. The Conclusion / Resolution is missing or inappropriate.	Main points are present with limited detail and development. Some critical thinking is present. The Conclusion / Resolution is present but could be better developed.	Main points are well developed with supporting details. Critical thinking is woven into the main points. The Conclusion / Resolution is present and generally makes a good argument.	Main points are well developed with high-quality support. Reveals high degree of critical thinking. The Conclusion / Resolution is compelling, persuasive, and ends the story effectively.
Paragraph Structure	Paragraphs lack unity and coherence and are not written deductively.	Some paragraphs are unified, coherent, and written deductively. Transitions are weak.	Most paragraphs are unified, coherent, and written deductively. Some illustrative examples are present Transitions are relatively strong.	All paragraphs are unified, coherent, are written deductively, and are supported with examples and have smooth transitions.
Sentence Structure	Mostly weak sentence cores and little or no variety in structure or diction.	Approaches graduate-level usage of strong sentence cores and some variety in sentence structures and diction.	Sentence cores are consistently strong. Tone is appropriate, and sentence variety and diction are used effectively.	Shows outstanding style; strong sentence cores throughout; tone used effectively; creative use of sentence structure and coordination.
Grammar & Mechanics	Spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors are distracting; fragments, comma splices, and run-ons evident. Errors are frequent.	Most spelling, punctuation, and grammar are correct, allowing reader to progress though the story fairly easily. Some errors remain.	Document has few spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors, allowing reader to follow the story easily. Very few fragments or run-on sentences.	Document is free of distracting spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. Document is free of fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences.
Format	Fails to follow length and format requirements; incorrect margins and spacing. Neatness of document needs attention.	Meets length and format requirements; correct margins and spacing. Document is neat but may have some presentation errors.	Meets length and format requirements; correct margins and spacing. Document is generally neat and approaching professional look.	Meets length and format requirements and evidences attention to detail. Document is neat and correctly assembled with professional look.

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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 before 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 I have submitted final grades.

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 discuss why you thought your work was effective and why you feel your grade did not accurately reflect that. If I make a mistake, 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 keep 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.

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 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 Use Your Words – They're the Best One:

All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. 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 plagiarize?

Besides 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 citation management resources you may want to consult:

- 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 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.

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.

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