PPHA 36640 – Fall 2025

AI-Assisted Writing for Public Policy

Wednesdays: 4:30-7:20 pm (Keller 0010)

Instructor: David Chrisinger (dchrisinger@uchicago.edu)

Teaching Assistant: Pei-Chin Lu (peichin@uchicago.edu)

Course Description:

This course equips students to collaborate effectively and ethically with tools like ChatGPT to draft, revise, and refine writing across public policy genres—including memos, data briefs, long-form narratives, and op-eds. Through hands-on exercises, students will learn to prompt effectively, edit critically, and integrate AI into their writing workflows without losing clarity, voice, or rigor. The course also addresses ethical concerns like bias, transparency, and professional responsibility. By the end, students will have built a portfolio that demonstrates not only technical fluency but also sound judgment in the use of AI for public policy communication.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Plan & co-write with AI to generate outlines, exploratory drafts, alternative framings, and revision plans across common policy communication genres.

2. Assess outputs for clarity, bias, and accuracy and document verification steps (fact-checks, citations, bias audits).

3. Match genre to purpose by guiding AI to follow conventions for policy memos/briefs, op-eds, and executive briefings.

4. Integrate ethics and transparency by drafting appropriate disclosures and articulating professional boundaries for AI use.

5. Design a sustainable workflow that balances efficiency with independent judgment and sound writing craft.

6. Apply Harris Writing Workshop frameworks (Triangle of Persuasion; human-centered, reader-friendly, solutions-oriented) and evidence tests (Status, Criteria, Interpretation, Outlook) to AI-assisted work.

7. Use narrative structure strategically (Aristotle's arc, Vonnegut's story shapes, "object of desire") to write compelling policy narratives without sacrificing rigor.

8. Map stakeholders, strategize potential policy solutions, and build reader profiles that incorporate behavioral insights to sharpen the effectiveness of communication.

Assessments & Final Portfolio:

Every submission—drafts and finals—must include an AI Use Log and a brief Reflection. Submit each item as a single Word doc or PDF (deliverable + log + reflection) on Canvas.

For citations, use Chicago (author–date) by default; another style (e.g., APA) is allowed with justification (e.g., planned publication venue) and must be used consistently.

Your Final Portfolio must include:

1. **Policy Memo to a real decision-maker** (with completed Reader Profile) — 1,200–1,600 words.

2. **Policy Reform Narrative** (op-ed or feature-style narrative) — 800–1,200 words, with a 1-page cover memo on audience/purpose/position and intended impact.

3. **Group Executive Briefing**: 10-minute in-class presentation + slide deck (8–12 slides) articulating a feasible policy solution; include stakeholder map and risk/mitigation notes.

4. **AI Reflection** (1,000–1,200 words): personal policy-writing workflow and disclosure practices moving forward.

5. **Prompt Library**: your curated prompts and patterns (with 2–3 brief notes per prompt on when/why/how to use).

Your Final Portfolio will account for 60 percent of your final grade, while your drafts will account for 25 percent. The remaining 15 percent of your grade will depend on your professional participation.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (Oct 1): What "Good Policy Writing" Looks Like

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Clear, concise, compelling writing in action: case study on seclusion/restraints in Illinois (GAO + ProPublica) and how watchdog reporting, oversight, and legislation interact (Accountability Feedback Loop)
- Harris Triangle of Persuasion (Audience/Purpose/Position) and the human-centered / reader-friendly / solutions-oriented lens
- Tenses in policy (past = blame; present = shame; future = inspire)

Practice: Analyze excerpts; build a preliminary Reader Profile; draft an issue pitch

Reflect/Plan: Share takeaways; set personal goals; choose a portfolio topic area

Deliverables: Issue pitch (300–500 words) + initial AI brainstorm log **(Fri 10/3)**

Suggested Readings:

- GAO report (2020) PDF: https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-345

- ProPublica/Chicago Tribune — "The Quiet Rooms" hub:
  https://www.propublica.org/series/illinois-school-seclusions-timeouts-restraints

- Harris Writing Workshop — How to Write a Policy Memo That Matters:
  https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2024/01/24/how-to-write-a-policy-memo-that-matters/

- Federal Plain Language Guidelines (PDF):
  https://www.plainlanguage.gov/media/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf

- Think Like a Detective, Write Like a Scientist (PDF on Canvas)

Week 2 (Oct 8): Prompting Fundamentals & Ethics

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Prompt patterns (role, constraints, exemplars, critique-and-revise loops);
- Disclosure options
- Bias and hallucination pitfalls
- Source tracking

Practice:

- Build a personal prompt library
- Draft an AI disclosure for your memo
- Set up a verification checklist

Reflect/Plan: Share one effective prompt; refine disclosure language.

Deliverables: Research plan + search-term list and source list scaffold **(Fri 10/10)**.

Suggested Readings:

- NIST AI Risk Management Framework 1.0 (PDF):
  https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/ai/nist.ai.100-1.pdf

- NIST AI RMF overview: https://www.nist.gov/itl/ai-risk-management-framework

- OECD AI Principles overview: https://oecd.ai/en/ai-principles

- AP Standards around Generative AI: https://www.ap.org/the-definitive-source/behind-the-news/standards-around-generative-ai/

- AI Best Practices for Authors (PDF on Canvas)

- AI in Academic Writing (PDF on Canvas)

- Can Academics Use AI to Write Journal Papers? (PDF on Canvas)

- Understanding Prompt Engineering: How to Talk to AI (PDF on Canvas)

Week 3 (Oct 15): Researching with AI

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Query expansion, scoping reviews at speed, summarizing responsibly
- Four Elements of a Persuasive Policy Recommendation (Status/Criteria/Interpretation/Outlook—SCIO) evidence table
- Building robust citations

Practice: Create SCIO tables in groups; draft a 1-page annotated source list.

Reflect/Plan: Share research gaps and next steps.

Deliverables: SCIO table + annotated source list **(Mon 10/20)**.

Suggested Readings:

- Harris Writing Workshop:

    - The Four Elements of Persuasive Policy Writing: https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2023/03/15/the-four-elements/

    - USAID: A Four Elements Case Study: https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2023/03/15/usaid-a-four-elements-case-study/

- HKS — How to Write a Policy Memo (PDF): https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/hks-communications-program/files/lb_revised_1_31_18_lb_how_to_pol_mem.pdf

- USC Libraries policy memo guide: https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/assignments/policymemo

- Does ChatGPT Ignore Article Retractions and Other Corrections Online? (PDF on Canvas)

Week 4 (Oct 22): Writing the Policy Memo with AI (Virtual)

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Deductive paragraphs
- Sentence cores
- Reader navigation
- Genre checklists

Practice: Breakout-room drafting sprints; peer triage using a memo rubric

Reflect/Plan: Identify 3 revision targets; plan stakeholder outreach

Deliverables: Memo Draft 1 + AI Use Log + Reflection **(Fri 10/24)**

Suggested Readings:

- Harris Writing Workshop:

    o Deductive Structure:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2023/04/11/deductive-structure/

    o Strong Sentence Cores:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2023/04/11/improving-sentence-clarity-with-strong-sentence-cores/

- UNC Writing Center — Paragraphs: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/paragraphs/

- Why Human Writing Is Essential in the Age of AI (PDF on Canvas)

Week 5 (Oct 29): Revising with AI

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Diagnostic prompts for structure, clarity, and bias
- Fact-checking & red-teaming
- Trauma-informed language
- Reader Profile (Moral Foundations + prospect theory cues)

Practice: Live revision lab; create a stakeholder map (influence/interest) for your memo

Reflect/Plan: Set a verification plan; swap checklists

Deliverables: Memo Draft 2 + Reader Profile + Reflection **(Tue 11/4)**

Suggested Readings:

- Harris Writing Workshop:

    o Moral Foundations Theory (applied):
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2023/03/15/using-moral-foundations-theory-to-analyze-audiences/

    o Self-editing strategies:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2024/03/12/pruning-needless-words-and-other-self-editing-strategies/

- PlainLanguage.gov — Guidelines (organization & sentences):
  https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/

- Yale Poorvu — Coherence & Flow (PDF):
  https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2024-12/Coherence%20and%20Flow%20From%20Old%20to%20New%20Information%20GWL%20Handout.pdf

- Moral Foundations Theory (PDF on Canvas)

- Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations (PDF on Canvas)

- Shifting Liberal and Conservative Attitudes Using Moral Foundations Theory (PDF on Canvas)

- On the Conversational Persuasiveness ChatGPT 4.0 (PDF on Canvas)

- Belief in the Utility of Cross-Partisan Empathy Reduces Partisan Animosity (PDF on Canvas)

Week 6 (Nov 5): Writing the Policy Narrative with AI

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Aristotle's dramatic arc
- Vonnegut's "shapes of stories"
- Object of Desire
- Weaving data and people
- Ethical persuasion

Practice: Turn SCIO evidence into a 3-act op-ed; peer pitch session (which outlet, why now)

Reflect/Plan: Identify revisions and reporting to strengthen the narrative

Deliverables: Op-Ed/Narrative Draft 1 + AI Use Log + Reflection **(Mon 11/10)**

Suggested Readings:

- Harris Writing Workshop:

    o How to Write an Impactful Op-Ed:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2024/02/08/how-to-write-an-impactful-op-ed/

    o Aristotle's Dramatic Arc:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2024/03/12/aristotles-dramatic-arc/

    o Vonnegut's Man-in-Hole:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2024/03/12/kurt-vonneguts-man-in-hole/

    o Object of Desire:
      https://writingworkshop.harris.uchicago.edu/2024/03/12/understanding-the-object-of-desire/

- The OpEd Project — Resources: https://www.theopedproject.org/resources

- Gaslighting an Entire Nation (PDF on Canvas)

- Missing in Chicago (PDF on Canvas)

- What Happened to Empathy? (PDF on Canvas)

Week 7 (Nov 12): Executive Briefings & Slide Decks

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Storylining
- Slide clarity
- Annotating visuals
- Speaker-note scaffolds
- Rehearsal prompts
- Importance/difficulty matrix for prioritization

Practice: Group deck outline; draft 1–2 key visuals with AI assist + human edits

Reflect/Plan: Peer review of deck skeletons; rehearse openings

Deliverables: Group deck outline + stakeholder map **(Fri 11/14)**

Suggested Readings:

- MindTools — Stakeholder Analysis (influence/interest): https://www.mindtools.com/at2o1co/what-is-stakeholder-management

- ProjectManagement.com — Power/Interest grid explainer: https://www.projectmanagement.com/wikis/368897/stakeholder-analysis--using-the-power-interest-grid

Week 8 (Nov 19): Professional AI Workflows (TA-Led)

Lecture & Demonstration:

- Pei-Chin's real-world process for brainstorming → researching → outlining → drafting → revising → fact-checking → polishing → publishing with AI

Practice: Replicate parts of her workflow on your op-ed or brief; create a QA checklist for accuracy and tone

Reflect/Plan: Identify two workflow changes you'll adopt

Deliverables: Revised Op-Ed/Narrative Draft 2 or brief + QA checklist + Reflection **(Tue 11/25)**.

Suggested Readings:

- AP Standards around Generative AI: https://www.ap.org/the-definitive-source/behind-the-news/standards-around-generative-ai/

- University Students Offload Critical Thinking, Other Hard Work to AI (PDF on Canvas)

- More and More Students Are Using AI to Cheat (PDF on Canvas)

- The AI Takeover of Education Is Just Getting Started (PDF on Canvas)

Week 9 (Nov 26): Final Presentations & Portfolio Sprint

Lecture & Demonstration:

- 10-minute group briefings + Q&A

Practice: Peer feedback gallery; prompt-library swap; "future-use plan"

Reflect/Plan: Portfolio readiness checklist; individual next-steps

Deliverables: Final slide decks due by 12:00 pm CT on presentation day **(Wed 11/26)**

Final Portfolio Due: Wed, Dec 3, 2025, 11:59 pm CT (submit as a single document)

Course Expectations:

Harris Academic Policies and Standards

Given this is a Harris course, [all students in this class are subject to the Harris academic policies and standards](). Any further amendments and interpretations of these policies are documented below.

Mandatory Attendance

In-person attendance for the full class session is required and will be tracked.

You are allowed two unexcused absences for the quarter but will still be responsible for the week's assignments unless you have requested and been granted an extension. Any further absences may be excused in the case of bereavement, sickness, or other circumstances outside your control.

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. For example, 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 fifth 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.

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

Engagement and Decorum

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.

While I respect a lively and engaging discussion and at times may encourage it, learning is the primary goal of this course, so if that engagement becomes disruptive or a barrier to advancing through the day's lesson, I may move us back on topic. In these cases, the expectation is professionalism; simply put, you may need to table your discussion for later so the class can move forward.

Academic Integrity and Dishonesty

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

Most 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.

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