

 **Syllabus****BLHS 165, Writing for the Public Relations Professional****Fall 2008****3 credits**

This class has four face-to-face meetings: 6-7 p.m., Fridays September 5, October 3, November 7, and December 5, at 3307 M Street NW, Suite 202, Room 201A.

Other coursework will be completed on this Blackboard site.

In the BALS curriculum at Georgetown, this course carries credit toward the Public Relations path of the Communication concentration. Students in other BALS concentrations may use the course for elective credit.

**Overview**

LSHS 165 will focus on improving the writing skills needed for the public relations and corporate communications professionals. Students will review the basic principles needed to write public relations materials, however, with an emphasis on creating superior news/press releases--the keystone to all public relations activities. In addition, students will learn how to create usable media/information kits and materials that are necessary to conduct communications activities, such as backgrounders, fact sheets, letters to the editor, pitch letters and biographies.

This course is organized in a non-traditional way: The course includes four in-person meetings, but the bulk of the classwork will be done independently online.

That means that much of your learning will rely on materials from the Web site and your text book, from your interactions with me and your fellow students, and from your assignments.

Some people sign up for a Web-based course out of the impression that it will be easier compared to a traditional, face-to-face course. **This is not true**, and laboring under that misconception can cause some heartache as the semester draws on.

It **is** true that this course is more flexible than a traditional class. You can log on at any hour of the day or night to complete your assignments and participate in discussion.

But that flexibility means that you will need better study discipline and organization than in a traditional class. Do not allow yourself to fall behind.

All in all, I hope that you find this to be a stimulating, enjoyable learning experience. Please let me know if you have any feedback or suggestions about the course.

--Vincent Kiernan

**How the online part of the course will work**

The online portion of this course is organized by weeks. **This is not a self-paced course; you are expected to complete assignments by set deadlines.** This approach allows the class as a group to work through material together and will help prevent you from falling behind.

The class week starts on Monday and concludes on Sunday. Each week, you will be asked to read portions of your text book or other materials and to visit relevant Web sites.

Each week also includes an online discussion question related to the current week's topic. You are expected to make one posting by **midnight Wednesday**. Then you should read your classmates' postings, and make followup postings by noon Saturday. The Discussion

Board provides details.

Written assignments are due each week as well. In general, these are due by **midnight Sunday**. The Assignments section of Blackboard contains details.



### Office hours

Feel free to call or email me at any time. But I also will hold office hours every Thursday from 1-2 p.m.

My office is located in the School of Continuing Studies on the second floor of [3307 M Street NW](#) in Georgetown. Note that this is not on campus, but rather in Georgetown proper.

During these office hours, I also will be in the course's Blackboard chat room. Feel free to drop by if you have questions, concerns, or would just like to chat with me and/or your fellow students.

The chat room probably is not the best setting to discuss personal information such as grades.

To join in:

1. Click on the "Communication" link on the left side of the screen.
2. Click on "Collaboration."
3. Click on the "Join" button next to "Office hours".
4. If an "X" appears in the chat window, click on the link to the Java site and follow instructions for downloading the program.
5. If you need assistance with downloading or installing the Java program, contact the Georgetown's [Blackboard support center](#).



### Response time

This course uses amazing online technology, but it still includes a flesh-and-blood instructor. This means:

- In most cases, your assignments are **not** graded by the computer. They are graded by me, and I cannot do that instantly. You can expect to receive grades on an assignment within a week after the assignment's due date.
- I am online frequently but not 24/7. That means you will not get instant responses to email inquiries. I will answer e-mails, questions posted to the discussion board and telephone messages as quickly as I can -- within one business day after I received it.



### Grading policies

#### Course grades

Each assignment has a specific weight in the final grade. These weights are listed in the online gradebook and are described in the description of each assignment.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- 90% to 100% = A
- 79% to 89% = B
- 68% to 78% = C
- 57% to 67% = D

You can determine your current grade percentage in the course by looking in the gradebook under the category **Running Weighted Total**.

### Assignments

Grading standards for each assignment are included in the description of each assignment.

### Online discussion

Most weeks, there is an online discussion question. Each week's discussion will count as 1 percent of your final grade.

Your week's discussion grade will take into account both whether you meet the deadlines for discussion postings and the substantiveness of your postings.

When responding to someone else's posting a *substantial* posting is one that says more than "Me too" or "I disagree." A substantial response will explain *why* you agree or disagree and will provide evidence or examples to support your position.

### Class participation

The class will have four face-to-face meetings. Participation in each class session is worth 0.5% of your final grade.

### Extra credit

There may be an opportunity to earn extra credit by submitting extra writing assignments. Details will be posted in the Announcements section of Blackboard.

### Late assignments

**Important:** Media professionals live and die by deadlines. **No credit will be given for any assignment that is submitted late without the instructor's prior approval.** "*Prior approval*" means that the student must communicate with the instructor *before* the assignment's deadline.

An assignment that is submitted late **with** the instructor's prior approval will have its grade reduced by 10 percent for every day it is late.

### Accuracy

Your writing must be factually accurate. Errors, even seemingly minor ones, will have a heavy impact on your grade.

### Grammar and style

Similarly, your writing must conform to professional standards. Written assignments should contain no grammatical or spelling errors, and your writing should conform to AP style.

### Academic Misconduct policies



#### Plagiarism

The presentation of someone else's ideas or work as your own, or without proper acknowledgment, is the worst crime a mass-communication professional or a scholar can commit.

The sources for all information and ideas in your assignments must be documented. In addition, all quotations must be identified as quotations, using quotation marks and documentation of the source of the quotation. Anything less than these standards is plagiarism.

Plagiarized work will be reported to Georgetown's Honor Council (see below). If the council finds that the work has been plagiarized, the work will receive a grade of 0 for the assignment for a first offense; a second plagiarism will earn an F for the course.

### Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume

you have read the honor code material located at [www.georgetown.edu/honor](http://www.georgetown.edu/honor), and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

### Turnitin.com

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be added as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers in the future. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.



### Submitting Assignments

Written assignments must be submitted electronically, in both Blackboard and Turnitin.com. An assignment will not count as submitted until it has been uploaded to both Web sites. Printed assignments will not be accepted and will earn **no credit**. Similarly, assignments submitted by e-mail will not be accepted and will earn **no credit**.

All work for this class should be typed double-spaced, spell-checked, have one-inch margins, and use 12-point font. Follow AP style.

A. To submit an assignment in Blackboard, do the following:

1. Click on the ">>View/Complete" link for the assignment.
2. Click on the Browse button if you have a file to attach. (For best results, make sure your filename consists of only letters or numbers. There should not be any other symbols or characters in the filename.)
3. Attach the file and complete all other items on the page.
4. Click on the Submit button at the bottom of the page.
5. Look for the confirmation indicating that your assignment has been uploaded. Note: At this point, your gradebook will show an exclamation point, indicating that your instructor has received the assignment but has not yet graded it. If you see a padlock icon instead, it means that you did **not** successfully submit the file and that you should repeat the above steps to submit it. If you are still having problems, contact the [support center](#) and indicate what message you received after you clicked on the Submit button.

B. To submit your assignment to Turnitin.com, do the following:

In order to submit your papers to Turnitin you will have to go to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com). The first time you go to the site you will click on the link **new user** and create a user profile. To do this you will need the following information:

Class ID: 1930274

Password: lshs165

A movie located at <http://www.turnitin.com/static/training.html> will walk you through the process of setting up your account and submitting papers.

Once you have set up your account you can login and click on the link for this class. Then click on the correct assignment link and upload your paper.



### **Disabilities**

If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu).



### **Snow and other emergencies**

During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check [the university's Web site](#) or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will not meet.

Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to inclement weather.

The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up at [Student Access +](#).



### **Some Cyber-Advice**

You are investing lots of time and money in your online study. Unfortunately, any number of technical problems can destroy that work -- a lightning strike to the power line that supplies your computer, an attack by a virus that makes your hard-disk unreadable, or even an editing error on your own part. As a result, you should consider some simple steps that can help prevent problems from happening and help you cope with them if they do crop up.

#### **Antivirus software**

Obtain, and use, antivirus software on your computer. It can be a heartbreaking experience to discover that your computer--and perhaps your backed-up files as well--have been corrupted by a virus or worm.

And simply installing the software is not sufficient. Because new viruses and worms are constantly appearing, it is vital that you periodically update your computer's database of antivirus information. Follow the instructions in your antivirus program to do so, or preferably configure it to automatically update itself periodically.

#### **Antispyware software**

Spyware is another type of computer pest. It secretly installs itself on your computer and may monitor and record everything you type, including passwords, bank-account numbers, and Social Security numbers.

So install, and use, antispyware software. Free programs available online include Microsoft's Windows Defender (<http://www.microsoft.com/spyware>), Ad-Aware SE (<http://www.lavasoft.com>), and Spybot Search and Destroy (<http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html>).

#### **Firewalls**

It is likewise important to use a firewall to shield your computer from hacking attacks. Windows XP and Windows Vista have basic firewalls that will provide a sufficient degree of protection, but you must be sure to activate the firewall. Unfortunately, sometimes a firewall will interfere with legitimate online education programs, so if you run into any problems, contact the IT support department.

#### **Windows updates**

A fourth way to help make sure that your computer is not derailed by a hacker attack is to keep your computer's copy of Windows up to date. Microsoft periodically issues patches that are aimed at correcting weaknesses in Windows that can be exploited by hackers. By

downloading and installing these patches, you can improve your computer's security. To check for patches for your machine, visit <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com>.

**Software updates**

You can further strengthen your computer by downloading any patches for the software you run on it, particularly Microsoft Word. These patches include fixes for both bugs in the software and vulnerabilities that can be exploited by viruses and worms. For Microsoft patches, check <http://office.microsoft.com/officeupdate>.

**Back up frequently**

If you store your work on your computer, you should back up those files on a regular basis. Backups give you a fallback position if a file becomes corrupted by a software or hardware problem, and they also can be useful to consult if you change your mind about a new version of your writing. If your computer can write CDs or DVDs, you can make backups in that fashion. If your files are small, they may fit on a floppy disk.

**Other suggestions**

University Information Services has several other suggestions for safe computing. Please take a moment to [read through them](#).

[COURSES](#) > [WRITING FOR PR PROFESSIONAL.SPRING2008](#) > [STAFF INFORMATION](#)



### **Dr. Vincent Kiernan**

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**Work Phone** 202-687-5145

**Office Hours** Thursdays 1-2 p.m. Eastern time, both online and at 3307 M St., Suite 202. Also by appointment.

#### **Notes**

Generally, e-mail is the fastest way to reach me; we can set up a telephone conversation that way if you prefer.

Also, I frequently can be contacted via Google's Google Talk service. This offers both text messaging and online voice calls. My Google ID is [vincent.kiernan@gmail.com](mailto:vincent.kiernan@gmail.com)

Another way to get answers to your questions, from me or from your peers, is through the "General questions and discussion" section of the Discussion Board. I will be checking it regularly.

PLEASE NOTE: I am online frequently but not 24/7. I generally check Blackboard once every business day, in mid to late morning. If you post a message or send an email later in the day, you may not get a response from me until the next business day.

#### About me

I am an assistant dean in Georgetown's School of Continuing Studies (<http://scs.georgetown.edu>). I am in charge of the Bachelor's of Liberal Studies program, in which working adults take courses at night and on weekends toward an interdisciplinary college degree.

I have been a journalist for more than 20 years. Most recently, I worked for nine years as a senior editor and senior writer for The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>), a weekly trade newspaper in Washington, D.C., that covers all sorts of goings-on in academe.

I was one of the information technology reporters, and my particular assignment was to follow advanced-technology projects such as supercomputing.

Most of my career, in fact, has been spent in journalism about science, medicine, and technology. I have had enormous fun: I've been the U.S. correspondent for New Scientist, a British weekly science magazine, which dispatched me to the South Pole, among other interesting assignments; and a reporter for Space News, for which I trolled the halls of the Pentagon for news. I've walked through a nuclear reactor, seen gigantic lasers, watched the disassembly of nuclear weapons, played with DNA, witnessed a nighttime space shuttle launch, and interviewed Nobel Prize winners.



I've also published two books on computer technology, "Writing Your Dissertation with Microsoft Word" and "Finding an Online High School."

Besides being a working journalist, I also am (I hope!) a scholar of journalism. In 2002, I earned a doctorate in mass communication from the University of Maryland at College Park. My research examines the relationships between the media and the scientific establishment.

A book based on my dissertation, "Embargoed Science," was published in August by the University of Illinois Press. (See <http://insidehighered.com/views/2006/08/21/kiernan> )

Here are links to some of my recent work for The Chronicle:

"Toss Out the Index Cards," June 9, 2006  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i40/40a02901.htm>

"Sign of the Times," May 12, 2006  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i36/36a03701.htm>

"Mightier than the Pen Alone," Feb. 24, 2006  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i25/25a03101.htm>

"Show Your Hand, Not Your ID," Dec. 2, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i15/15a02801.htm>

"Ready for the Next Katrina?" Oct. 14, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i08/08a03101.htm>

"Not the Internet You Know," Sept. 9, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i03/03a03101.htm>

"Rounding Up 'Rogue Servers'," July 8, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i44/44a02501.htm>

"Use the Smart Classroom: A Spanish Professor Tries Several Tech Tools," June 24, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i42/42b01001.htm>

"Budget Cuts at NSF May Signal a Crisis in Computing,"  
May 20, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i37/37a00101.htm>

"Missing the Boat, or Penny-Wise Caution?," March 11, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i27/27a03301.htm>

"The Next Plague," Jan. 25, 2005  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i21/21a03601.htm>

"Plugging Holes in the Security Dike," Oct. 8, 2004  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i07/07a03101.htm>

"The Next Information Superhighway," July 9, 2004

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i44/44a02901.htm>

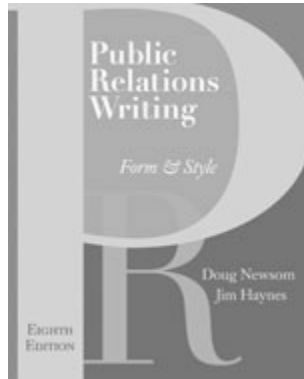
"If You Like This Student, Click Here," June 4, 2004

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i39/39a02301.htm>

 **Books****Required Text**

The following textbook is required:

**Public Relations Writing: Form & Style**, 8th edition, by Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes  
Published by Wadsworth Thomson  
Copyright 2008  
ISBN 0495095664



You can buy this book from Georgetown's [bookstore](#) or from any other bookstore that you wish. (If you use another bookstore, be sure to get the proper edition. If the cover doesn't look like the picture here, you do not have the correct edition.)

The publisher also sells [online versions](#) of the text.

If you order online from Georgetown's [bookstore](#), you can arrange to pick your book up at the bookstore or have it shipped to you for a small fee. The bookstore is located in [Leavey Center](#), and its phone number is 202-687-7492.

**Dictionary**

Get, and use, a good dictionary. (If you don't have a dictionary and don't want to buy one, you can use the online version of the *American Heritage Dictionary* at <http://www.bartleby.com/61/>)

## Overview of course topics

Course week	Topic
1-2	Introduction to PR writing
3	Persuasion, research and planning
4	Writing style
5	Grammar, spelling and punctuation
6	Email, memos, letters, reports and proposals
7	News releases
8	News for broadcast
9	Features
10	Brochures and magazines
11	Messages
12	The Internet and media kits
13	Speeches and newsletters
14-15	Crisis communications