

UMBC UGC New Course Request: MCS 407: Political Writing

Date Submitted: 2/14/2019

Proposed Effective Date: Fall 2019

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COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	MCS 407
Formal Title	Political Writing
Transcript Title (≤30c)	Political Writing
Recommended Course Preparation	Completion of the Writing Intensive Requirement
Prerequisite NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	N/A
# of Credits Must adhere to the UMBC Credit Hour Policy	3
Repeatable for additional credit?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Max. Total Credits	3 <small>This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.</small>
Grading Method(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reg (A-F) <input type="checkbox"/> Audit <input type="checkbox"/> Pass-Fail

PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (Approximately 75 words in length. Please use full sentences.):

MCS 370/ POLI 409 is a special topics course on political writing. The goal of the course is two-fold: first, to introduce students to various forms of political writing; and, second, to train students to produce quality examples of those forms.

Political Writing introduces students to writing within the professions of politics, public policy and political communications. Students learn to write both as surrogates on behalf of principals as well as in their own voice. Among other assignments, students learn how to write op-eds, campaign ads, policy papers, and campaign speeches.

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

The department has offered the course three times already, under the special topics # MCS 370, and in collaboration with Political Science, cross-listed with their special topics number. Both departments agree that it should be a permanent course offering.

ATTACH COURSE SYLLABUS (mandatory):

MCS 407/POLI 407—POLITICAL WRITING

Tuesdays 4:30-7:00

FA 558

Dr. Thomas F. Schaller

COURSE OVERVIEW

POLI 409/MCS 370 is a special topics course on political writing. The goal of the course is two-fold: first, to introduce students to various forms of political writing; and, second, to train students to produce quality examples of those forms. Given its title and upper division level, the course includes a very significant writing component. Performance expectations are very high—from the instructor as well as your fellow students, who will serve as peer editors.

INSTRUCTOR

My office is 314 PUP. My email is schaller@umbc.edu; phone is x52845. Of these options, email is the most effective means to contact me, especially for administrative matters. Between classes, I communicate with students via BlackBoard. My office hours are Mondays and Tuesdays, 9:30 to 11 a.m., or by appointment.

BOOKS AND READINGS

Reading assignments for this course will be of three types:

- The first are traditional readings designed to introduce students to a particular form of political writing;
- The second are examples of each form, including columns written by *New York Times* columnists and political essays curated by *Longreads.com*;
- Finally, students will read and critique writing assignments submitted by their peers in class—a process intended to sharpen students' writing and editing skills by making them critique their peers' work and respond to their peers' critiques.

In addition to a series of readings available either online or via Blackboard, the one required book for the course is *Political Writing: A Guide to the Essentials*, by Adam Garfinkle (2012: ME Sharpe). The book is available at the UMBC bookstore.

QUIZZES

There are 11, five-minute weekly grammar quizzes. Each quiz includes 10 items for students to either correct or indicate as already correct. Quizzes will be graded on pass/fail basis, with seven or more correct answers needed to pass. The worst of each student's 11 quizzes—including any missed quiz from unexcused absence—is dropped, and the P/F ratio is computed based on the 10 remaining scores.

WRITING

Each student will complete seven writing assignments, all of them under strict deadline and, in two cases, in timed events within a short, specified turnaround period. The assignments range from 250 words to 2,500 words. The first four will be written as if ghosted in the voice of a politician or other political/electoral principal; the second three will be written in students' own voices. Each writing assignment proceeds in four stages:

- *Form stage*. First, we dedicate time in class examining and deconstructing the rhetorical exigencies of each form of political writing. Guest speaker-experts will join us either in person or by phone to help explain their specific writing craft
- *Draft stage*. Next, each student delivers a completed draft of each form that adheres to sometimes very strict guidelines as to objective, length and style. In two cases (press release; letter to the editor), delivery occurs during a timed event with hard deadline.
- *Editing stage*. Students and professor critique and provide line edits on drafts.
- *Submission stage*. Students submit final versions for instructor to grade.

The two units and seven assignments are:

Unit 1: Writing as surrogates

- a. Press release*
- b. Position paper or briefing memo
- c. Two campaign ad scripts
- d. Political speech

Unit 2: Writing in your own voice

- a. Letter to the editor*
- b. Op-ed
- c. Analytical magazine article

*The starred assignments (1a and 2a) will be submitted via email to instructor during a pre-arranged and timed "simulated deadline" event conducted during non-class hours. These short assignments do not entail peer editing. Scheduling of these timed submissions will be decided in class, based on students' availability.

For the five remaining writing assignments, there are three deadlines:

- *Draft deadline*: Initial submission of draft versions due on Thursdays, 6 p.m.;
- *Edit deadline*: Peer-plus-instructor edits distributed to writers by Sunday, 6 p.m.;
- *Final deadline*: Writers submit edited, final versions to professor by TBD deadline—longer revision periods for larger assignments.

The tentative draft deadlines for (D)raft and (E)dit stages are as follows:

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|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| • 1b/position paper: | D—Thursday, February 28 | E—Sunday, March 3 |
| • 1c/campaign ad scripts: | D—Thursday, March 14 | E—Sunday, March 17 |
| • 1d/political speech: | D—Thursday, April 11 | E—Sunday, April 14 |
| • 2b/op-ed: | D—Thursday, April 25 | E—Sunday, April 28 |
| • 2c/magazine article: | D—Thursday, May 9 | E—Sunday, May 12 |

EDITING RESPONSIBILITIES

In rotating, assigned pairs, students will edit each other's writing for the five non-timed assignments list in the previous paragraph. The students will vote on which peer review format to employ: *a double-blind system* (neither writers nor editors know each other's identities); *a single-blind system* (writers know the identities of their editors, but not the inverse), or *a universal-identity system* (writers know their editors, and vice versa). We will use the tracked-changes function of Word to conduct all editing by peers and the professor.

GRADES

Grades will be a function of class participation, quiz performance, and evaluation of the seven writing assignments. The grading standards will be as follows:

A: Regular-to-frequent, quality class participation; all assignments turned in complete, on-time and in accordance with assignment guidelines, very good to excellent quality; exceptional grammar quiz performance.

B: Infrequent-to-regular, quality class participation; all assignments turned in complete, on-time and in accordance with assignment guidelines, good to very good quality; strong grammar quiz performance.

C: Infrequent-to-regular or frequent yet poor quality class participation; some assignments turned in late, incomplete or not in compliance with assignment guidelines, and/or of mediocre quality; mediocre grammar quiz performance.

D: Infrequent-to-regular or frequent yet poor quality class participation; several assignments turned in late, incomplete or not in compliance with assignment guidelines, and/or of poor quality; poor grammar quiz performance.

F: Little if any quality participation; most assignments turned in late, incomplete, and/or not in compliance with assignment guidelines and expectations; failing grammar quiz performance.

READING SCHEDULE

In addition to the weekly readings delineated in the schedule below, there are two ongoing reading assignments. First, each student will follow one of three *New York Times* columnists, assigned at the start of the term; second, as a class we will read some *Longreads.com*-curated political articles and essays. Note: The reading schedule may shift based on guest lecturers' availability.

January 29—Introduction: Syllabi distributed and explained; in-class writing exercise

February 5—Skillful writing, part 1: Writing in the social sciences

- “Politics and the English Language,” by George **Orwell**, *Horizon*, April 1946.
- “Writing, Typing and Economics,” by John Kenneth **Galbraith**, *The Atlantic*, March 1978.
- “Political Language and Political Reality,” by Murray **Edelman**, Chapter 6 in *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (1988: University of Chicago).
- **Grammar quiz:** Capitalization (Shertzer, Ch. 4)

February 12—Media communications and press relations

- “Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Trump’s Battering Ram,” by Paige **Williams**, *The New Yorker*, September 24, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/24/sarah-huckabee-sanders-trumps-battering-ram>
- “The Job of Presidential Press Secretary Takes a Toll,” by Paul **Farhi**, *Washington Post*, May 30, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-job-of-presidential-press-secretary-takes-a-toll/2014/05/30/c04597d2-e83a-11e3-a86b-362fd5443d19_story.html?hpid=z1
- **Grammar quiz:** Commas (Shertzer, p. 79-88)
- **Guest lecturer:** Isabel Adulnate (UMBC ‘15), deputy national press secretary, U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer

February 19—Policy writing

- **GARFINKLE**, Chapters 9 & 10
- *Writing White Papers*, by Michael **Stelzner**, WhitePaperSource Publishing, 2006, selected chapters
- **Grammar quiz:** Colons & semicolons (Shertzer, p. 88-94)
- **Guest lecturer:** **Bethann Ritter** (UMBC ‘01), policy analyst, GAO

February 26—Skillful writing, part 2: The uses, power and limitations of rhetoric

- **GARFINKLE**, Chapter 1
- Introduction and Chapter 6 in *Simple & Direct: A Rhetoric for Writers*, by Jacques **Barzun**, (1975: Quill).
- **Grammar quiz:** Apostrophes and quotation marks (Shertzer, 96-103)

March 5—Campaign persuasion

- “Emotional Appeals in Ad Campaigns,” by Ted **Brader**, Chapter 6 in *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds* (2006: University of Chicago).
- “16 Ads that Mattered in 2016,” by Daniel Strauss, *Politico*, November 6, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/2016-election-best-campaign-ads-230789> (NOTE: Must read online to click on links to see ads; therefore, not on Blackboard.)
- **Grammar quiz:** Dashes, parentheses, brackets and hyphens (Shertzer, 104-113)
- **Guest lecturer: Walter Ludwig**, founder and principal, Indigo Strategies

March 12—Skillful writing, part 3: The importance of editing

- **GARFINKLE**, Chapters 2 & 3
- “Rewrite to Focus” and “Rewrite to Edit,” Chapters 2 & 8 (partial) in *The Craft of Revision*, 3rd edition, by Donald **Murray**, (1997: Harcourt Brace).
- **Grammar quiz: Diction** (Princeton, 98-103)

March 19—No class; spring break

March 26—Political speechwriting, part 1

- *The Political Speechwriter’s Companion*, by Robert **Lehrman**, (2010: CQ Press), Chapters 1, 2, 5 & 6
- **Grammar quiz: Pronouns** (Princeton, 24-33)
- **Guest lecturers: Robert Lehrman**, adjunct professor at American University and former Democratic speechwriter for Al Gore; **Debbie-Ann Sunga** (UMBC ‘08), former Obama 2012 speechwriter, currently speechwriter for National Automobile Dealers Association

April 2—Political speechwriting, part 2

- **GARFINKLE**, Chapter 7
- “Lincoln’s Greatest Speech?” by Garry **Wills**, *The Atlantic*, September 1999, <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/99sep/9909lincoln.htm>
- **Grammar quiz:** Adjectives, adverbs and prepositions (Shertzer, 35-44)
- **Guest lecturer (invited): Michael Gerson**, *Washington Post* columnist and former speechwriter for George W. Bush

April 9—*Vox populi*

- We will read a few dozen recent newspaper letters to the editor, as selected by instructor in advance.
- **Grammar quiz:** Phrases and clauses (Princeton, 56-64)
- **Guest lecturer:** TBD

April 16—Op-eds and political columns, part 1

- **GARFINKLE**, Chapter 6
- **Grammar quiz:** Agreement (Princeton, 79-87)
- **Guest lecturer (invited): Michelle Goldberg**, columnist, *New York Times*

April 23—Op-eds and political columns, part 2

- “And Now a Word From Op-Ed,” by David **Shipley**, *New York Times*, February 1, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/01/opinion/01SHIP.html>
- “What We Talk About When We Talk About Editing,” by David **Shipley**, *New York Times*, July 31, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/31/opinion/31shipley.html>
- **Grammar quiz:** Numbers (Shertzer, Ch. 6)

April 30—Long-form political writing, part 1

- **GARFINKLE**, Chapter 4
- “The First White President,” by Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic*, October 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>
- **Guest lecturer:** TBD

May 7—Long-form political writing, part 1

- Selection of articles chosen during the semester by students and professor from *Longreads.com*

May 14—Long-form editing day

- In-class peer editing day of long-form essays; no assigned readings.