**Introduction to Policy Writing**

**521.01**

Fall 2023

Dates and Time: Thursdays from 4:00pm – 5:20pm. We’ll meet each Thursday from August 31 – September 28.

Instructor: Alex Ralph

Office: 3236 Weill

Email: ralpha@umich.edu

Remote office hours: available via <https://fordschool.mywconline.com>

**Course Goals**

The goal of this course is to familiarize you with the norms and types of policy writing. While policy writing draws upon principles familiar to academic writing, it has its own conventions, which are rooted in the needs and practices of policy professionals.

Through these five intensive classes, we believe you will acquire greater confidence to excel in the policy writing expected of you at the Ford School and in your future career.

**Course Requirements**

For these classes to be successful, they will require active student participation. By electing to take this five-week module, you are expected to take all requirements seriously and to give us your best writing—and your best criticism.

*Requirements for passing the course include*

* Completion of three writing assignments: stakeholder memo, strategy memo, op-ed.
* Active participation, which includes a) critiquing your peers’ written work; b) attendance and punctuality; c) volunteering your ideas.

Failure to meet these requirements will result in an “unsatisfactory” course grade.

**Workshop, Critiques, and Instructor Feedback**

*Workshop*

Each of you will be workshopped by the class one time. When it is your turn to be workshopped, you will email your assignment to the class in advance. On the day of the workshop, your peers will have read, critiqued, and come prepared to discuss your work.

When it is your turn to be workshopped, you will email your assignment to the class and to me in advance **by noon on the Tuesday before workshop**. You will *also* upload a copy to Canvas for purposes of my record-keeping. When your peers come to class on the day of your workshop, they will have read and critiqued your work and will be prepared to discuss it.

Please follow these guidelines for formatting your assignments:

* Name your assignment files **LastnameFirstname-AssignmentName.doc**; *example*: RalphAlex-StakeholderMemo.doc.
* Double space and paginate
* Include your name and a word count on the first page of the document

*Critiques*

A critique should consist of roughly three typed paragraphs at the end of the document. It should include the following:

* a few sentences explaining what, specifically, you admired about the work.
* “big picture” questions or comments: what didn’t you understand? what felt poorly supported? what was organizationally ineffective?
* specific suggestions for addressing your concerns.

Any style or sentence-level issue can be indicated directly in the document or by using Track Changes. It should go without saying that the aim of these workshops and critiques is to encourage rather than discourage. That doesn’t mean you should check your honest appraisal. As opposed to generic praise, you should give thoughtful, constructive criticism that actively engages with the author’s ideas and words.

Please submit an electronic copy of your written critique to Canvas **before the start of class**. At the end of the workshop, you will email your critiques (both your critique and line edits) to the student being workshopped.

*\*****Please see separate handout (available on Canvas) for more information on writing peer critiques.***

*Instructor Feedback*

You will receive written feedback on the document that you submit to be workshopped. For the other two documents, you will set up individual appointments with the instructor to discuss the work further; I recommend doing this the week you turn in each document. Appointments can be made through the Ford School Writing Center scheduler: http://fordschool.umich.edu/writing-center/

**Course Content**

This course will introduce you to three distinct genres of policy writing: the stakeholder memo, the strategy memo, and the op-ed. Before we write and critique these three genres ourselves, we will examine different approaches and strategies students and professionals have adopted.

Each act of writing involves informed choices that you, the writer, must negotiate. What makes for an effective opening? When and where and how can we amplify our voice to persuade or educate our readers? How can arguments work more successfully? How might we develop greater stylistic precision? By taking this course, we believe you’ll develop a better sense of how to answer these questions in your written work.

**Our Classroom Values**

Below I have included information from the Ford School administration that you’ve probably seen on the syllabi of other Ford classes. I do, though, want to briefly elaborate. Simply put, as your teacher it’s my responsibility to do my best to ensure that each one of you feels respected and heard. If conflicts arise, if you feel uncomfortable with something I say—or that a classmate says—please let me know right away. My goal is to help you to write the strongest papers you can—but it’s also to help create a classroom space that prioritizes learning and that pleasurable snap that comes from a meaningful exchange of ideas.

**Ford School Inclusivity Statement:** Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

* share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
* be open to the views of others
* honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
* appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
* value one another’s opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
* keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
* use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community

**Ford School Public Health Protection Policy:** In order to participate in any in-person aspects of this course--including meeting with other students to study or work on a team project--you must follow all the public health safety measures and policies put in place by the State of Michigan, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan, and the Ford School.  Up to date information on U-M policies can be found [here](https://campusblueprint.umich.edu/).  It is expected that you will protect and enhance the health of everyone in the Ford School community by staying home and following self-isolation guidelines if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.

**Student Mental Health and Wellbeing:** The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students.  We acknowledge that a variety of issues, both those relating to the pandemic and other issues such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, can directly impact students’ academic performance and overall wellbeing. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available.

You may access counselors and urgent services at [Counseling and Psychological Services](https://caps.umich.edu/) (CAPS) and/or [University Health Service](https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs) (UHS).  Students may also use the Crisis Text Line (text '4UMICH' to 741741) to be connected to a trained crisis volunteer.  You can find additional resources both on and off campus through the [University Health Service](https://uhs.umich.edu/stressresources) and through [CAPS](https://caps.umich.edu/article/um-mental-health-resources).

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please reach out to U-M [Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD)](https://ssd.umich.edu/) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations and how to communicate about your accommodations with your professors. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

## Academic Integrity: The Ford School academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the Ford School promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one’s own in writing or presentations, and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action. The Ford School's policy of academic integrity can be found in the [MPP/MPA,](https://umich.box.com/v/2019-masters-handbook) [BA](https://umich.box.com/v/2019-ba-handbook), and [PhD Program](https://umich.box.com/v/phd1819) handbooks. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available at:   <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies/section11#112>

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## Use of Technology:Students should follow instructions from their instructor as to acceptable use of technology in the classroom, including laptops, in each course. All course materials (including slides, assignments, handouts, pre-recorded lectures or recordings of class) are to be considered confidential material and are not to be shared in full or part with anyone outside of the course participants. Likewise, your own personal recording (audio or video) of your classes or office hour sessions is allowed only with the express written permission of your instructor.  If you wish to post course materials or photographs/videos of classmates or your instructor to third-party sites (e.g. social media), you must first have informed consent. *Without explicit permission from the instructor and in some cases your classmates, the public distribution or posting of any photos, audio/video recordings or pre-recordings from class, discussion section or office hours, even if you have permission to record, is not allowed and could be considered academic misconduct.*

**Please review additional information and policies regarding academic expectations and resources at the Ford School of Public Policy at:** [**https://intranet.fordschool.umich.edu/academic-expectations**](https://intranet.fordschool.umich.edu/academic-expectations)

**Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Tools:**

When it comes to GenAI tools, we are all collectively in the Wild West. The technology has outpaced our regulatory and procedural know-how, as well as, in many instances, any shared ethical pacts. A year from now we have come to some greater consensus—or we may still be as confused as we are today.

So how are we to approach AI usage in this course? I’m open to suggestions as I’m still figuring out possible best practices myself—and we’ll plan to discuss AI usage during our initial class. But I nonetheless wanted to provide what I hope to be reasonably clear guidance to head off confusions or problems.

This guidance—and the language that follows—I’ve taken with permission from my thoughtful colleague Molly Spencer.

GenAI tools, however imperfect at this stage, are now part of the educational and professional landscape, and it’s important that we all learn to use them effectively and ethically. Because this is a writing course, however, using GenAI to generate your papers and other assignments would severely undermine your opportunity to learn to draft, organize, and polish cogent, strategic, and well-supported arguments in written form. Even in an AI-enabled world, the thinking and writing skills this course teaches are crucial for policy professionals, and it would be an abandonment of my responsibilities as a writing instructor to encourage you to skip this element of your policy education. For this reason, ***the following uses of GenAI tools are not permitted*:**

* Impersonating yourself in classroom contexts, such as by using GenAI to answer discussion questions or to complete in-class assignments, including group work (if any)
* Generating a draft of a writing assignment, including in-class exercises, papers, and written critiques
* Correcting grammar, usage, and stylistic errors
* Running an assignment through a GenAI tool for a final edit
* Generating entire sentences, paragraphs, papers, or written critiques, even if you later refine them

***The following uses of GenAI tools are permitted with disclosure*:**

·       Brainstorming ideas for papers

·       Generating an initial outline, which you later refine and expand, to organize your thoughts for papers

·       Assisting with word choice (although a thesaurus—digital or physical—may be a better tool for this)

·       Developing an initial list of research sources (although it’s worth noting that GenAI tools sometimes “hallucinate” sources, and in this way, are not entirely reliable for this task)

Regarding “with disclosure”: You must disclose GenAI use in a note on your cover sheet for papers (or elsewhere for other assignments and activities, if applicable). Your disclosure must include: the GenAI tool you used; the prompt you fed to the tool, a record of the material it generated, and a description of how you refined the AI-generated result.

Schedule

Class #1 August 31

Topic: Stakeholder Memos

* Policy Writing Norms
* Stakeholder Memo Discussion
* Solicit Volunteer #1 to submit Stakeholder Memo for Class #2 workshop.

*Homework to be completed before 9/7:*

* *Stakeholder Memo*
* *Write critique of Volunteer #1’s stakeholder memo and upload to Canvas; turn in line edits.*
* *Review clarity and concision principles (“Principles, Tips, and Tricks for Clarity and Concision”). (This document can be found on Canvas.)*
* *Read strategy memo samples. (Readings can be found on Canvas.)*

Class #2 – September 7

Topic: Executive Summaries

* Workshop #1: Stakeholder Memo
* Strategy Memo Discussion
* Solicit Volunteer #2 for Stakeholder Memo for Class #3 workshop

**DUE:** **Stakeholder Memo (Assignment #1)**

*Homework to be completed before 9/14:*

* *Write strategy memo and upload to Canvas*
* *Write critique of Volunteer #2’s stakeholder memo and Volunteer #3’s strategy memo and upload each to Canvas; turn in line edits*

***Note: Class on 9/14 will be conducted online via Zoom.***

Class #3 – September 14

Topic: Strategy Memos

* Workshop #2: Stakeholder Memo
* Workshop #3: Strategy Memo

**DUE: Strategy Memo (Assignment #2)**

*Homework to be completed before 9/21:*

* *Write critique of Volunteer #4’s strategy memos and upload to Canvas; turn in line edits*
* *Read and annotate op-ed handouts*

Class #4 – September 21

Topic: Op-eds

* Workshop #4: Strategy Memo
* Op-Ed Discussion

*Homework to be completed before 9/28:*

* *Write op-ed and upload to Canvas*
* *Write critiques of Volunteers’ #5 and #6 op-eds and upload to Canvas; turn in line edits*

Class #5 – September 28

Topic: Developing your argument

* Workshop #5: Op-ed
* Workshop #6: Op-ed
* Course Wrap-up

**DUE: The Op-Ed (Assignment #3)**