**Introduction to Policy Writing | PUBPOL 521.013  
Fall 2023**

**Dates: Thursdays, October 19 – November 16, 2023  
Time: 11:30AM - 12:50 PM U.S. Eastern  
Room: Weill Hall 1210 / The Frey Classroom**

**Instructor:** Molly Spencer | she / her / hers  
**Office:** 3223 Weill Hall  
**Email:** [mollysp@umich.edu](mailto:mollysp@umich.edu)  
**Office hours:** By appointment at <https://fordschool.mywconline.com/>  
 **Course Objectives:** While policy writing draws on some principles familiar to academic writing, it has its own conventions, which are rooted in the needs and practices of policy professionals. In this five-week, pass/fail course, you will practice skills and develop confidence to succeed in the policy writing expected of you at the Ford School and beyond. Specifically, the goals of this course are: to familiarize you with types and fundamentals of policy writing; to develop the skills you need to construct persuasive, written arguments; to learn and practice skills for clear and concise writing; and to develop your skills in critiquing and editing writing, including your own.   
 **Course Readings and Materials:** I will provide all course readings. *Bring copies of the readings to class each week.* You will also need a writing instrument and a notebook or laptop for note-taking. You will do some writing by hand in this course.

**Course Design and Components:** This class is structured as a writing workshop in which students read, discuss, and comment on one another’s papers based on the principles of effective policy writing we discuss in class. A workshop is simply a conversation about a piece of writing aimed at identifying what is effective and persuasive in the piece and what might benefit from revision. The assumption of any writing workshop is that by providing constructive feedback to other writers, we become better writers and revisers of our *own* work.

*Workshop Schedule:* Workshops will take place during Weeks 3, 4, and 5 of the course, and each student will have a minimum of one paper workshopped. During our first meeting, I will ask for volunteers for each week's workshops. After that, I'll update the assignment schedule so that Canvas will reflect what's due for you and when. When your classmates come to class on the day of your workshop, they will have read and considered your work and will be prepared to discuss it.

Written Critiques and Line Edits: You will write a critique in paragraph form for three of the workshopped papers, one per week during Weeks 3, 4, and 5. A written critique should consist of roughly three single-spaced, typed paragraphs (minimum of a half-page; no longer than a page-and-a-half) and should include the following:

* A few sentences explaining what, specifically, is working well in the piece and why
* “Big picture” questions or comments: What didn’t you understand? What claims felt poorly supported? What was seemed out of order and/or repetitive?
* Specific suggestions for addressing your concerns
* One or two sentence-level edits (“line edits”) that aim to make a sentence or two clearer or more concise

*You may not use Word’s commenting and track changes tools to write your critiques; they must be in paragraph form.* While written critiques are not graded, I check them for quality and completeness. If your critique does not meet the above guidelines, you will be asked to revise and resubmit it until it is satisfactory. There are sample critiques on Canvas with my notes indicating what is and is not satisfactory in them.

*During Workshop*: *Have a copy of the workshop paper to refer to in class*. At the end of the workshop, you will give a copy of your written critique to the student whose paper is being workshopped (if you prefer, you may send your written critique via email after class). In addition to providing your classmates with critiques of their work, you will upload your written critiques to Canvas for my recordkeeping purposes. Although you are *writing* one critique per workshop, you should be prepared to critique both papers in specific, actionable terms during workshop*.* In essence, you’ll be doing the reading and thinking required to critique both memos, but you will write a critique for just one.

Instructor Feedback: You will receive detailed written feedback from me on the paper you submit for workshop. If you would like feedback on your other two papers, set up an appointment with me to discuss them on my writing center schedule (<http://fordschool.umich.edu/writing-center/>). I recommend doing this soon after you turn in each paper. If none of my open times work for you, let me know, and we’ll find a time that does. If you’d like me to reserve the appointment so that you don’t use your one weekly writing center appointment, I am happy to do so.

Important Note on Critiquing Writing: The aim of critiquing writing is to describe and encourage. All feedback—in workshop, written critiques, and line edits—should be delivered in this spirit. That doesn’t mean you should check your honest appraisal of things that aren’t effective in the workshop papers. As opposed to generic praise or criticism, however, you should give specific, constructive, and actionable feedback that engages with the author’s argument, intent, and words as they appear on the page.

**Course Requirements**

To receive a "satisfactory" (pass) grade you must complete all assignments satisfactorily and participate actively in all five class sessions (see “Attendance, Illness, and Extensions” section below for exceptions).

**Assignments**

The assignments in this course are as follows:

* *Readings and discussion questions:*Prior to each class session, read and annotate the sample documents and consider the discussion questions provided on Canvas. You are not required to turn in answers to discussion questions, but you should come prepared to discuss your responses in class. It may be helpful to jot down some notes and / or have a copy of your answers to refer to during class.
* *In-class writing exercises:* We’ll begin each class with a writing exercise to practice policy writing norms, principles of clear and concise writing, and / or argumentation. Usually, the exercise is to revise a sentence (or a few). You’ll need a writing utensil (pen or pencil) to complete these exercises.
* *Three short papers:* a stakeholder memo[[1]](#footnote-1) (max. 500 words), a strategy memo (max. 500 words), and a short opinion piece (op-ed) (min. 750 – max. 900 words). In the memos, you will write as an analyst at an organization to the decision maker(s) of that organization. In the op-ed, you will write as the leader of the organization trying to gain and influence public attention in favor of your organization’s goal.
* *Three written critiques*, one per workshop week,of your classmates’ assignments.

**Course Topics, Assignment Schedule, and Due Dates (Please note that *individual due dates for papers will vary according to workshop schedule*):**

| **WEEK / TOPIC** | **ASSIGNMENTS** | **DUE FROM** | **DUE DATE** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **WEEK 1 – October 19**   * Course introduction / workshop schedule * Policy writing fundamentals * Stakeholder memo discussion |  |  | n/a |
| **WEEK 2 – October 26**   * Stakeholder memos, continued * Clear and concise writing | Readings and discussion questions | Everyone | Thursday 10/26 in class  (not turned in; be prepared to discuss in class) |
| **WEEK 3 – November 2**   * Workshops 1 and 2 * Strategy memo discussion | Stakeholder memos for workshop | Volunteers 1 and 2 | Sunday 10/29 5:00PM  (upload to Canvas *and* email to instructor & class) |
|  | Readings and discussion questions | Everyone | Thursday 11/2 in class  (not turned in; be prepared to discuss in class) |
|  | Written critiques | Everyone | Thursday 11/2 before class  (upload to Canvas *and* give copy to classmate in class) |
|  | Non-workshop stakeholder memos | Everyone *except* Volunteers 1 and 2 | Thursday 11/2 before class  (upload to Canvas) |
| **WEEK 4 – November 9**   * Workshops 3 and 4 * Op-ed discussion | Strategy memos for workshop | Volunteers 3 and 4 | Sunday 11/5 5:00PM  (upload to Canvas *and* email to instructor & class) |
|  | Readings and discussion questions | Everyone | Thursday 11/9 in class  (not turned in; be prepared to discuss in class) |
|  | Written critiques | Everyone | Thursday 11/9 before class  (upload to Canvas *and* give copy to classmate in class) |
|  | Non-workshop strategy memos | Everyone *except* Volunteers 3 and 4 | Thursday 11/9 before class  (upload to Canvas) |
| **WEEK 5 – November 16**   * Workshops 5 and 6 * Focus on counterargument | Op-eds for workshop | Volunteers 5 and 6 | Sunday 11/12 5:00PM  (upload to Canvas *and* email to instructor & class) |
|  | Readings and discussion questions | Everyone | Thursday 11/16 in class  (not turned in; be prepared to discuss in class) |
|  | Written critiques | Everyone | Thursday 11/16 before class  (upload to Canvas *and* give copy to classmate in class) |
|  | Non-workshop op-eds | Everyone *except* Volunteers 5 and 6 | Thursday 11/16 before class  (upload to Canvas) |

**Preparation & Engagement**The value of this course will depend heavily on how well each of you has prepared for class, and the nature of your engagement in class discussions. In class, I look for the following signs that you’re engaged: presence; familiarity with readings and discussion questions; focus (avoiding distractions); asking questions; listening attentively; building off what others have asked or said; making connections among concepts, readings, and/or class discussions. I understand that speaking in groups comes more easily to some than to others, so I am not inclined to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to contributions in class, but I ask that you make your best effort to participate substantively in ways that feel authentic, even if not always entirely comfortable, to you. I do not prohibit the use of electronic devices in my classrooms; however, if you use one (or more), make sure you’re interacting with your peers and me—and not exclusively with your screen(s)—during class.

**Attendance, Illness, and Extensions**

Being in class is important, and so is your health and the health of others. If you don’t feel well, please stay home. Absences are excused for illness and other emergencies. I ask that, when possible, you contact me 24 hours in advance of due dates and class meeting times if you anticipate missing them.

If illness or other emergencies affect your ability to turn in assignments on time, please fill out the “I need an extension!” form in the Course Information module on Canvas. Please note that *extensions cannot be given on workshop papers*, since an extension would reduce the amount of time your classmates (and I) have to develop feedback for you. Extension requests not related to illness or emergencies must be made 24 hours in advance of the deadline through the “I need an extension!” form on Canvas. All class sessions will be recorded and uploaded to Canvas through lecture capture; if you miss class, the best way to know what you missed is to watch the recording. If you have questions that are not answered in the class recording, make an appointment to meet with me and we can go over your questions together.

**Engaging with Difficult Material**

Public policy is innately tied to problems of systemic bias and human suffering. Please be aware that you might encounter material in this course that is disturbing to you. Please also be aware that, even if something is not disturbing to you, it could be to those around you. Let’s all approach potentially difficult subject matter and differences of opinion on policy matters with kindness, respect, and awareness of our own positionality vis-à-vis the issue at hand.

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

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, these thinking and writing skills 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 brief description of how you refined the AI-generated result.*

**Canvas Site:** The Canvas site is organized by modules: one that contains general course information and one for each week of the class. Assignments due for each week will be in that week’s module. While I generally publish all modules before the start of a course, I may make small modifications depending on our progress through the material and student interests; therefore, I encourage you not to work ahead on future modules.  
 **Communication:** Please *check your e-mail regularly and opt into Canvas Announcements notifications*. E-mail and—for information that applies to the whole class—Canvas Announcements, are the primary ways I will communicate with you. I ask that you use e-mail to contact me and not the Canvas messaging function—this allows me to consolidate all my communication on one platform. Please begin your subject line with course and section number (e.g., “PUBPOL 521.007”). I generally do not to check e-mail during evenings or weekends.

Office hours are another good way for us to communicate with one another. You can schedule an office hours appointment with me at <https://fordschool.mywconline.com/>. If none of my open appointment times work for you, let me know, and we’ll find a time that does. If you’d like me to reserve the appointment for you so you don’t use up your weekly writing center appointment, I am happy to do so. Appointments generally take place in my office, Weill Hall 3223, although I am happy to meet with you via Zoom as well if you prefer.

**Changes to Syllabus and Schedule:** This syllabus and the assignment schedule are subject to change, although changes are unlikely unless prompted by student needs and/or interests. I will inform you of any changes, and the current syllabus will always be available on Canvas.

**DEPARTMENTAL INFORMATION**

**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 the Ford School’s embedded counselor Paige Ziegler (contact information TBD) and/or 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:** The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment for students with disabilities. Students who are experiencing a disability-related barrier should contact Services for Students with Disabilities <https://ssd.umich.edu/>; 734-763-3000 or ssdoffice@umich.edu). For students who are connected with SSD, accommodation requests can be made in Accommodate. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your SSD Coordinator or visit SSD’s Current Student webpage. SSD considers aspects of the course design, course learning objects and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student. Further conversation with SSD, instructors, and the student may be warranted to ensure an accessible course experience.

**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](https://www.dropbox.com/s/wuq2jfmbpflm4f2/FINAL%202023%20Masters%20Handbook.pdf?dl=0)  [BA](https://www.dropbox.com/s/zhllbd4vpfr439r/FINAL%202023%20BA%20Handbook.pdf?dl=0), and [PhD Program](https://www.dropbox.com/s/06x1tzt1e32pjjw/FINAL%202023%20PHD%20Handbook.pdf?dl=0) handbooks. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available [here](https://rackham.umich.edu/academic-policies/section8/#112).

***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**](https://intranet.fordschool.umich.edu/academic-expectations) **at the Ford School of Public Policy.**

1. I want to note the fact that the term “stakeholder” [has its roots in colonialism and is offensive to some groups, particularly indigenous communities](https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/dell/blog/posting.htm?id=reflecting-on-our-language-stakeholder#:~:text=Historically%2C%20the%20term%20stakeholder%20has,interest%20in%20the%20property%20or). However, because its use is still prevalent in the policy world, it’s terminology you’ll need to know until a more neutral term replaces it. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)