

## Communicating Academic Work to Policymakers

Spring 2021

Professor Lily Batchelder

Professor Martha Coven

### Initial Syllabus

2/23/21

- Class:** Wednesdays, 4:45-6:25 on March 3 and 10 (by Zoom)  
Wednesdays, 5:00-6:50 on March 17, 24, 31, and April 7 and 21 (by Zoom)
- Office hours:** By appointment by phone, Zoom, or FaceTime
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This seminar is designed for students who have devoted substantial effort towards developing a policy proposal in another class, and want to learn how to effectively advocate for their ideas with policymakers and the public. We will work on translating your ideas into shorter written pieces and oral remarks that are geared towards policymakers, thought leaders and the press.

### Course Requirements

The seminar meets weekly starting on March 3. During classes 1 to 4 and 6, we will discuss tools and methods for communicating with policymakers and the public. During class 5, each student will present their proposal to the class as if we are a key decision maker and their staff. We will then give you feedback on your presentation and written materials. During the final class, each student will present their proposal again after incorporating the feedback they received.

#### ***Draft Rollout Materials***

For your initial in-class presentation, you will need to prepare drafts of the following “roll-out” materials.

1. Talking points: 1 page of talking points designed to persuade a key decision maker to support or oppose your proposal, plus 2 pages responding to potential tough questions.

Note: For all page limits single-spaced is fine but please include space between paragraphs and bullets.

2. Slide deck to accompany your presentation: ~8 slides. Should include at least two graphics.

Note: There are some free graphic tools that students found helpful in the past at <http://www.creativebloq.com/infographic/tools-2131971>.

You will need to circulate your slide deck to the class **by 5pm on Sunday, March 28**. As part of that email, please tell us who your audience is and therefore who we are (e.g., Senator X, Assistant Secretary for Y, or Mayor Z and their staff) and any relevant background (e.g., Senator X has been a champion on this issue and is known for working across party lines).

You should circulate your talking points immediately after your in-class presentation.

### ***Initial Presentation***

Your initial presentations will be during our fifth class, on **March 31**.

We will spend 15-20 minutes on your briefing, which will involve you using your talking points and slide deck to present your proposal, while we frequently interrupt you with questions. We will then spend 5-10 minutes on feedback.

### ***Reaction Papers***

For each initial presentation, two students will be assigned to write reaction papers, providing feedback on the presentation itself and the accompanying slide deck. This feedback should be divided into sections on the presentation and substance. Reaction papers should be 1-2 pages single-spaced, and are due one week after the presentation (i.e., on **April 7**) to us and the presenter. Feel free to write informally and use the first person.

### ***Revised Rollout Materials and Final Presentation***

On the last day of class, everyone will present again based on the feedback you received. In addition to a revised version of your talking points and slide deck, you should prepare the following for your final presentation:

3. Op-ed: 600-800 words.
4. Tweet thread promoting your op-ed: Max 8 tweets. Should include at least 2 graphics and ideally links or graphics for each tweet.

You should circulate your slide deck, op-ed, and tweet thread to the class **by 5pm on the Sunday** before our last class (i.e., **April 18**).

During class, we will again spend 15-20 minutes on your briefing and 5-10 minutes on feedback.

### ***Final Rollout Materials***

While not required, if you would like to further revise your roll-out materials based on the feedback you received, please let us know and submit them by **noon** on the last day of exams (**May 11**).

### **Grade**

Your grade will be based on the following:

- 20% on class participation (judged on quality as well as quantity)
- 15% on your draft rollout materials and presentation
- 20% on your reaction papers (10% for each)
- 25% on your revised rollout materials and final presentation
- 20% on your final rollout materials (if different).

### **Assignments**

#### **Class 1 (3/3) – Briefing Policymakers**

Our first class will include introductions and cover the basics of how to understand one's audience and brief policymakers.

There is one assigned reading:

- Academy Health, *Communicating with Policymakers: Delivery Tips 101* (posted on NYU Classes)

In addition, email us the **following by Tuesday, March 2 at noon**:

- 250-350 word summary of policy proposal that is intelligible to a smart lay reader on a standalone basis.

#### **Class 2 (3/10) – Writing for Policymakers**

This class will focus on how to write for policymakers, including getting started, editing, and incorporating numbers and visuals. Please read the following in advance:

- Excerpts from M.B. COVEN, *WRITING ON THE JOB: BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNICATING IN THE DIGITAL AGE* (to be posted on NYU Classes on 3/1).
- MRDC, [\*Using Innovations in Financial Aid to Support College Success\*](#) (sample policy brief)

- Joshua Yaffa, [The Information Sage](#), WASHINGTON MONTHLY
- German Lopez, [American's Unique Gun Violence Problem, Explained in 16 Maps and Charts](#), Vox (sample graphics)

### **Class 3 (3/17) – Framing and Sharpening Your Policy Proposal**

This week's class will focus on how to sharpen your policy proposal so that it has the most impact. This includes making sure that is clear and accessible, addresses counter-arguments, provides policymakers with sufficient detail to be actionable, and takes into account constraints in the current political environment. Please read the following in advance:

- Excerpt from GEORGE LAKOFF, DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT! 1-29 (2014) (posted on NYU Classes).
- Excerpt from FRANK LUNTZ, WORDS THAT WORK 149-178 (2007) (posted on NYU Classes).
- Excerpt from G. RICHARD SHELL AND MARIO MOUSSA, THE ART OF WOO (2007) (posted on NYU classes)
- Trabian Shorters, [The Power of Perception](#)
- A case study of the second earner credit
  - Blog post:  
[http://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/new\\_tax\\_legislation\\_would\\_increase\\_return\\_to\\_work](http://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/new_tax_legislation_would_increase_return_to_work)
  - Policy brief:  
[http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads\\_and\\_links/THP\\_Kearney\\_Brief\\_Final.pdf](http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/THP_Kearney_Brief_Final.pdf)
  - *Optional* – Discussion paper:  
[http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads\\_and\\_links/THP\\_Kearney\\_DiscPaper\\_Final.pdf](http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/THP_Kearney_DiscPaper_Final.pdf) (you could just glance at it to see how the brief cut it down)

### **Class 4 (3/24) – Convincing the Public: Media and Social Media**

*Guest Lecturer: TBA*

This week's class will address media strategy, including the importance of identifying your

audience and objectives, what makes an engaging frame for an issue, and the classic tools of op-ed composition. We will also consider media strategy from the perspective of editors and reporters. What makes a good op-ed and press release? How can you best pitch ideas and develop relationships with reporters? How can you leverage social media? Please read the following in advance:

- Excerpts from M.B. COVEN, *WRITING ON THE JOB: BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNICATING IN THE DIGITAL AGE* (to be posted on NYU Classes on 3/1).
- *Anatomy of an Op-Ed* (posted on NYU Classes)
- Trish Hall, [Op-Ed and You](#), N.Y. TIMES
- Bret Stephens, [Tips for Aspiring Op-ed Writers](#), N.Y. TIMES
- [Additional potential readings to come]

### **Classes 5 (3/31) – Initial Class Presentations**

This week will be the first round of class presentations. Each of you should plan on your mock “meeting” lasting for 15-20 minutes (which will include us frequently interrupting you), followed by 5-10 minutes of feedback.

If you are writing a reaction paper on a presentation, you should read the slide deck circulated for the presentation in advance. If you are not, you should read nothing in advance, instead playing the (common) role of a meeting participant who did not review anything that the meeting requester shared in advance.

[Reaction paper assignments to come]

### **Class 6 (4/7) – Building an Advocacy Campaign**

This week’s class will focus on how to build a sense of urgency and consensus around your policy proposal so that policymakers are moved to act. This includes using stories to increase the emotional valence of your proposal, working in coalition with others to reach agreement on the approach, and adjusting your approach for the political environment.

[Readings to come]

### **Class 7 (4/21) – Final Class Presentations**

As noted above, everyone will present again based on the feedback you received. Everyone should read each other’s full set of roll-out materials in advance.