

## Communications Skills

XXXX.XXX

### CLASS SESSIONS

Days/time: Monday's 1:00-2:40  
Spring 2017  
Location:

### INSTRUCTOR

Thom Blaylock  
[thomblayock@nyu.edu](mailto:thomblayock@nyu.edu)  
Office 3016  
Office Hours:

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

I would love to call this course “Manipulation, in a good way.” The goal of the course is to help students get the most out of every form of communication: to change minds with the written word, win allies in person, to sway audiences in presentations, and to get what they want out of the various forms of communication most common in the careers of recent NYU Wagner graduates. Students will work both individually and collaboratively on a series of communications deliverables including: 1) Issue Briefs; 2) Memos; 3) Oral Presentations; 4) Press Releases; 5) Talking Points; 6) one-pagers; 7) Podcast; 7) A short video; and 8) A final unified campaign putting much of these forms together to enact a change you are passionate about.

Each work product will be treated as a case study with specific audiences and a well defined purpose.

### PREREQUISITES

Open to all Wagner students.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Write well-reasoned, fallacy-free, clear and effective documents (memos, briefs, letters of intent and social media posts);
2. Produce team-based work products
3. Layout and prepare well-written and aesthetically pleasing presentation slides
4. Edit for clarity, conciseness, grammar and appropriateness of content for a specific audience
5. Effectively participate in peer review work sessions by offering and receiving thoughtful, specific, and actionable editorial advice to and from class colleagues
6. Effectively take part in team decision-making.

## **TEACHING METHODS:**

In addition to short lectures, class discussions and case-based exercises, the course utilizes a writing workshop approach during many sessions. The main difference between a normal class and a workshop is that the foundation of workshop discussion and study is student work. Students will review their peers' work and offer thoughtful constructive criticism in a safe environment. The emphasis is not in just identifying flaws, but also identifying strengths that will help colleagues improve their assignments. The workshop setting also aims to help improve students ability to give and receive in-person feedback and run effective meetings.

## **Workshop Comments**

I will provide examples of both formal and informal peer reviews, but the basic format is as follows: a brief one paragraph summary of the submission followed by one paragraph outlining the main parts of the paper that are successful and one paragraph offering suggested improvements. These will be turned in to the workshopped student and will also form the intellectual framework for class discussion.

## **Readings:**

Readings will be posted on NYU Classes. I change supplemental reading based on issues I see in your writing and communication skills. When a reading is assigned, please bring a printed or digital version of it to class in case it is referred to directly. (It always is.) You should also purchase a clean composition notebook—I prefer the ones with perforated, removable pages for in-class assignments.

A comprehensive dictionary is also required. If you don't already own one Merriam Webster makes a good one: Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

If you prefer a web-based resource instead, you can get by using your online access to the inexhaustible Oxford English Dictionary through NYU's LibraryWeb, under the Databases link. The OED is a little less user-friendly than Webster's. It is not necessary to bring a dictionary with you to class, but I will expect you to know meanings of all words that appear in all the texts we read, (including the student-written texts and especially your own work.) If you don't know it, look it up. I may put you on the spot in class!

## **ASSESSMENT AND GRADING POLICY**

Student grades will be based on the assignments, attendance, and participation in peer-review workshops and will be broken down as follows:

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## **Communication Skills for policy Analysts**

Participation*	20%
Draft 1 Consultative or pitch memo	2.5%
Final revised consultative/pitch memo	7.5%
Reflection Piece	5%
MedLee Memo and talking points	10%
Final Group Presentation Video(Session 8)	10%
Deliciously Dangerous Brief draft 1	2.5%
Deliciously Dangerous Brief final draft	7.5%
Team Social Media presentation	5%
Final Unified Policy Campaign (Due end of term)	30%

\*This includes the formal, written peer comments as well as discussion comments offered in class and the short written assignments turned in under the “Hot Takes” tab on NYU Classes.

Final drafts of all revised pieces are due at the end of the term, but sooner is better!

### Grading

- A+ Reserved for highly exceptional achievement—I have given three in 13 years.
- A Excellent. Outstanding achievement.
- A- Excellent work, close to outstanding.
- B+ Very good. Solid achievement expected of most graduate students.
- B Good. Acceptable achievement.
- B- Acceptable achievement, but below what is generally expected of graduate students.

### A General Writing, Thinking and Presenting Rubric

ELEMENT	EVALUATION CRITERIA			
	A-EXCELLENT	B-GOOD	C - BELOW STANDARDS	N O T ACCEPTABLE
<b>ARGUMENT OR THESIS</b>	Strong and specific argument easily identifiable by intended audience.	A solid argument identifiable by a reader though not perhaps to the intended audience.	Generalized or vague argument not identifiable by a reader.	No identifiable argument.

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### Communication Skills for policy Analysts

	Major points and research reinforce the argument throughout the piece.	Most points reinforce the argument throughout the piece.	Some points reinforce the argument, but many fail to reinforce or relate to the argument.	Individual points lack cohesion and fail to express a uniform idea.
<b>C R I T I C A L T H I N K I N G   A N D A N A L Y S I S</b>	Clear presentation of critical thinking related to the issues, substance, central argument and research. Easily understood by intended audience.	Demonstrates effective critical thinking, but some points could be more fully developed. May not be easily understood by intended audience	Overall shallow analysis of topic. Need to delve deeper into subject.	Very little analysis.
	All facts, figures and supporting research relate to the central argument or thesis and are effectively contextualized and analyzed for intended audience.	Supporting research relates to the central argument and is mostly contextualized and analyzed for a reader.	Supporting research is either absent or is not contextualized and analyzed.	Discussion is entirely opinion-based without supporting, contextualizing or analyzing any research
<b>D E V E L O P M E N T O F   I D E A S</b>	Ideas are fully developed. Overall the piece is thought provoking.	Most ideas are fully developed and thoughtful.	Ideas are briefly explained, but information and analysis may lead to confusion by a reader.	Difficult to understand the ideas in the piece.
<b>A P P L I C A T I O N O F   T H E O R Y</b>	Theory and research clearly reinforces the central argument and major ideas	Demonstrates understanding of how theory and research is used to reinforce the argument and major ideas	Demonstrates some understanding of how theory and research should reinforce the major ideas	Fails to demonstrate an understanding of the theory and no clear use of research to reinforce argument or major ideas
<b>W O R D   C H O I C E</b>	Use of terminology is correct in all instances. Dead and tired clichés and metaphors are avoided.	Occasional use of inappropriate jargon, acronyms or imprecise terms. Minimal usage of dead and tired clichés and metaphors.	Many mistakes in terminology. Frequent use of dead and tired clichés and metaphors.	Imprecise terminology and heavy usage of jargon and acronyms.

## Communication Skills for policy Analysts

	Strong use of simple, precise and effective language easily read and understood by intended and potential audiences	Minor issues with wordiness, repetition. Easily understood by intended audience, but perhaps not by other potential audiences.	Some issues with wordiness and repetition. Mostly understandable to intended audience.	Wordy and repetitive.
	<b>A-EXCELLENT</b>	<b>B-GOOD</b>	<b>C-BELOW STANDARDS</b>	<b>NOT ACCEPTABLE</b>
<b>ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE</b>	Effective use of formal structure such as subheadings and conventional formatting.	Mostly effective use of formal structure. Subheadings could be more descriptive or formatting could be improved	Ideas difficult to follow.	
	Thoughts follow a clear internal logic reinforced by the formal structure	Thoughts mostly follow an internal logic reinforced by the formal structure	Lack of internal logic. Unclear formal structure	Completely illogical
	Overall structure is strong and contributes to the effectiveness and clarity of the piece.	Overall structure is acceptable.	Overall structure distracts from the meaning of the piece	Unstructured, disorganized
<b>GRAMMAR</b>	Few if any grammatical errors. Any errors do not affect meaning	Minor errors cause momentary distraction for readers.	Errors do not cause the writing to be unclear, but weaken the effectiveness of the communication	Systemic errors that make the writing difficult to read.
<b>ACADEMIC CONVENTION</b>	Research is properly cited for the medium of the piece.	Some missing citations or a few improperly cited sources.	Research is inconsistently cited. Un-cited facts, figures and passages bring about questions of plagiarism in reader's mind.	No citations. Clear violations of rules of plagiarism.

**Communication Skills for policy Analysts**

**A NOTE ON ATTENDANCE AND ITS EFFECT ON GRADES:**

Two absences can be excused with prior notification to the professor for no penalty. Barring true emergencies, each unexcused absence will subtract 1/3 of a letter grade from your final grade (i.e. an A+ would become an A.) **Students who attend all classes will receive a 1/3 grade bump in their final grade,** (i.e. a B+ would become an A-.)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

All students are expected to attend class, turn workshop assignments in on time, and come prepared to each session with written comments for their classmates who will be workshopped.

**WAGNER POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

[MISSION/VISION]

*Academic Integrity*

*Disability Access*

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1 – The ways people relate; Identifying Blind Spots; and General Writing Concepts

#### Learning Objectives:

- To discuss and understand the concept of writing workshop
- To consider audience as a constraint on every kind of writing.
- Gain insight into their own dominant social styles and reflect upon its impact on past and present leadership behavior
- Develop awareness of how various styles shape individual and team interactions
- Develop strategies for successful collaboration across styles

#### Reading:

- 1) The Little, Brown Essential Handbook: Introduction pp 1-8
- 2) Weeks, Holly. "The Best Memo You'll Ever Write." Harvard Management Communication Letter. Article Reprint No.: C0504C
- 3) Yoshino, K and Smith C (2013). Uncovering talent, a new model for inclusion. Deloitte University.
- 4) Tannen, D. The Power of talk: Who Gets Heard and Why. Harvard Business Review, Sept.-Oct. Reprint #95510

#### **Due Thursday, September 7, three short pieces:**

- 1) In 150 words or less, write your own obituary. Pretend you have lived the long successful life (however you define it) you hope to. Look online at some of your favorite deceased people for interesting obits and [also read these](#); **and**
- 2) In 100 words or less, tell me about a disastrous experience you have had due to a miscommunication or an accidental or unintended communication.
- 3) Complete Social Styles self-assessment and reading (<http://www.smallworldalliance.com/documents/SocialStyles-Assessment.pdf>)

#### **Assignment Due September 18, 11:59pm:**

Week 2, *Email Simulation and mini presentations*—**Computers or tablets with keyboards required for this session.**

Learning Objectives:

- To give informal presentations in the context of a meeting
- To write an effective and appropriate draft email response to an in class prompt
- To analyze the financial basics of three different ACA health insurance plans.
- To communicate data analysis using a visual.
- To quickly revise and polish one's own work synthesizing classmate suggestions.
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Assignment:

- 1) Before Class: Research basic coverage components of ACA healthcare plans. Bring your notes to class so you can speak about: **1) HSAs, 2) FSAs, 3) Deductibles, 4) Co-Insurance, 5) Copays, 6) Premiums, 7) Medicare (who is covered in NY), 8) Medicaid (who is covered in NY), 9) Community Benefit at hospitals, and 10) out-of-pocket maximums.** Everyone will be asked and randomly assigned to make an informal presentation on one of the above 10 concepts. **You will be filmed for you to review your meeting comporment later.** You do not need to be expert, but you will need to know the difference enough to speak about each one of these for 2-3 minutes and advise an intelligent non-expert (a friend of yours not at Wagner) on which health plan she should choose.
- 2) Reflection piece—In 200-300 words, tell me what you want to accomplish during the time you are studying at Wagner and what you are doing, so far, to achieve that goal.



## Weeks 3 – 4: Workshopping Business and Policy Memos

### Learning Objectives:

- To write effectively for a specific audience;
- To identify problems within each text and communicate ideas to solve those problems;
- To communicate effective strategies of revision synthesizing thorough consideration of the workshop discussions and written comments.
- To learn the formal anatomy of the business memo and several approaches to writing them.
- Utilize the SQCR method and the Minto Pyramid to prepare written

### Reading and Assignment:

1. Sample colleague review memo 1 and 2
2. Student-written Consultative or Business Proposal Memos— instructor will determine schedule, no more than 5 will be read per class.

### **Assignments:**

- 1) **Before each class:** Prepare short (250-350 word) memos for each piece of student writing workshopped in the class. Upload to NYU Classes. The memo should outline the main aspects of each piece that are succeeding and those that should be improved during the revision process.

## Week 5: The One-pager on Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations

**Learning Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- Quickly and succinctly summarize a complicated policy issue for a specific audience
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**Readings:**

- Read the case assigned to your randomly assigned team (every group has a different, but related case about an organization trying to implement a new diversity and inclusion campaign)
- Rashid, R; and Sherbin, L. "[Diversity Doesn't Stick Without Inclusion.](https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion)" Harvard Business Review. 2-1-2017. <https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion>
- Bush, M; and Peters, K. "[How the Best Companies Do Diversity Right.](http://fortune.com/2016/12/05/diversity-inclusion-workplaces/)" Fortune: Commentary. 12-5-2017. <http://fortune.com/2016/12/05/diversity-inclusion-workplaces/>

**Assignment:**

- 1) **Complete the one-pager requested in your assigned case study for your specific audience. Make sure it fits on one page and includes at least one graphic that helps to convince your reader your suggestion is a good one.**

## Week 6: Negotiations in difficult policy environments

### Learning Objectives:

- To understand the concepts and processes managers need to conduct both formal and informal negotiations.
- Know how to effectively implement negotiation tactics, especially those related to distributive bargaining or interest based negotiation
- To develop skills for engaging in cross-cultural negotiation and conflict resolution, and how to deal with cultural differences
- To better understand the strengths and weaknesses of your typical approach to conflict resolution

### **Required Readings:**

- MedLee Case
- Ury, W. (1993). Getting past no: Negotiating in difficult situations, Ch 1 and 3
- Sebenius, James K. "Six Habits of Merely Effective Negotiators". Harvard Business Review. April, 2001
- [export.gov](https://www.export.gov/article?id=Thailand-selling-to-the-government) Thailand joint-venture pages: <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Thailand-selling-to-the-government>

### Assignments

- Due Before Class: you have been called in to help solve the dispute between the two parties in the MedLee joint venture. Prepare talking points for your side of the negotiation. Do not share the supplemental information that appears only for your group on NYU Classes.
- Due Before next class: In a 1000-1500 word memo propose a way forward before the two CEOs meet next month. Your memo will be geared toward the party you did not represent during the in-class negotiations.

Weeks  
7-8

**Presentation: Film Study**

Learning objectives:

- To give a clean, clear concise presentation employing the SCQR method
- To create original tables, charts and figures that help translating Quantitative data into easily understandable forms.
- To offer classmates constructive feedback on slide decks, quality of interpersonal presentation skills and

Readings:

1. Russell, L. and Munter, M. Guide to Presentations (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Pearson. (New York) 2013. Chapters 5 and 6.
2. Environmental Toxicants and Maternal and Child Health: [http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/womens-and-childrens-health-policy-center/publications/Environ\\_Tox\\_MCH.pdf](http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/womens-and-childrens-health-policy-center/publications/Environ_Tox_MCH.pdf)
3. Dupuis, N. and Rainwater, B. The Sharing Economy: an Analysis of Current Sentiment Surrounding Homesharing and Ridesharing. 2014. *National League of Cities*. <http://www.nlc.org/Documents/Find%20City%20Solutions/City-Solutions-and-Applied-Research/Sharing%20Economy%20Brief.pdf>.
4. "Health Policy Brief: Federally Facilitated Exchanges," *Health Affairs*. January 31, 2013.
5. Whitman, K. and Shoffner, D. The Projected Effects of Social Security Benefit Increase Options for Older Beneficiaries. Social Security Administration Policy Brief No. 2013-01 (October 2013): <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/policybriefs/pb2013-01.html>

Assignment: Group Presentation. As a group, choose a topic related to one of the four issue briefs assigned this week (Social Security solvency, Healthcare Exchanges, the Sharing Economy, or Environmental Toxicants.) Each group will receive a different target audience for their presentation, so even if two groups choose the exact same topic, the presentations will differ. Prepare a brief overview (10-15 minutes max) of the scholarly research that will be of most interest to your intended audience. Presentations must include one of each of the following:

- 1) An original Table
- 2) An original chart or graphical display of quantitative data.

Learning objectives:

- To edit, revise and rethink the group presentation.
- To compare and contrast Academic writing, memos and issue briefs;
- To edit for concision, effectiveness and clarity

Readings:

1. Russell, L. and Munter, M. Guide to Presentations (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Pearson. (New York) 2013. Chapters 2, 3 and 4.
2. Perceptual Edge: Examples of ineffective graphics and how to fix them: <http://www.perceptualedge.com/examples.php> (review the left column.)

Assignment: Video presentation. Revise and prepare the **final group video** synthesizing feedback from the first round presentation film study. The final product should be a 5-7 minute video. You may use slides, graphics, images and voice over. It is a presentation, but it is also a short video. Remember to gear it toward your specified audience. We will watch and critique in class

Learning objectives:

- To workshop texts in small peer teams.
- To address specific issues found in the texts.

Readings:

1. Deliciously Dangerous Milk—Donors Request a Controversial Change to a Community Hospital (original case)
2. Real Raw Milk Facts—and especially the current regulations and proposals in place in Wisconsin. <http://www.realrawmilkfacts.com/>
3. The Dangers of Raw Milk: Unpasteurized Milk Can Pose a Serious Health Risk. Food And Drug Administration. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm079516.htm>

Assignment: (from Deliciously Dangerous Milk) *You work as the policy intern for a small community hospital in Friendship, WI. Several of the hospital's main funding partners, who own dairy farms, have been pushing the state to ease its rules regarding the sale of unpasteurized milk. They recently set up a meeting with the hospital director and among other things, asked her to "stop handing out the FDA 'propaganda'" discouraging the consumption of raw milk. The director gives you very little background except to say that she grew up on raw milk delivered by her local dairy and that if she had not been scared by a listeria outbreak that killed a former high school classmate of hers in Waterloo ten years ago, she would still be drinking it. "I don't know if it is the homogenization or the pasteurization, but fresh milk tastes ten times better than anything from the grocery." She then asks you to prepare a brief, comprehensive summary of the current literature on pasteurization and raw milk for her to consider before deciding how to proceed with the funders. "If you come up with any specific recommendations on how the hospital should handle this," she says, "even better."*

She is very busy and does not have the time to even read a medium-length report. She needs an Issue Brief, and she needs it now. Keep it to fewer than five pages and make it as easy to read and understand as possible. It is intended for her eyes only, but you never know to whom she may forward it.

## Week 11 –*Public Sector Pricing—Dallas Suburban Bus Case*

### Learning Objectives:

- To perform basic cost-benefit analysis on a major governmental initiative.
- To consider the diffe

### Reading:

1. *DART'S Suburban Service, Harvard Kennedy School case no. 1696.0*
2. Suburban service Request for Proposals
3. HULME, Claire. Using Cost Effectiveness Analysis; a Beginners Guide. **Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**, [S.I.], v. 1, n. 4, p. 17-29, dec. 2006.

### Assignment:

Prepare a brief response to the request for proposals of how to address the problems facing bus route 383 in particular and DART more generally. The audience will be DART's board, General Manager and concerned citizens affected by any potential changes to DART service. Be sure to include and present in a clear way a basic cost-effectiveness analysis of any proposals you discuss in your brief.

## Week 12 –*Unified Campaign part 1*

Learning Objectives:

- To prepare for a larger unified policy campaign

Reading:

- 1) Dumb ways to die Video
- 2) Dumbways to die Marketing case: <https://dumbwaystodiecasestudy.wordpress.com>
- 3) Four short podcasts on NYU Classes

Assignment:

- 1) Before class: In 200 characters or less, answer each of these questions: a) what did MTA want to accomplish?; b) do you like the dumb ways to die campaign?; and c) is it effective?
- 2) Individual Presentation (small team or whole class depending on number of students): Choose a policy change you want to see happen. Prepare a short (3-4 minute) presentation of the policy and why it is important to you and your community. You may define community any way you like, but please make clear the scale of your community, the problem you will be addressing, and the potential scale of the campaign to enact your policy change. We will workshop your presentation and campaign in class.

Week 13 – *Unified Campaign 2 – Memo and Podcast*



Learning Objectives:

- To prepare for a larger unified policy campaign

Reading:

- Teammates policy memo or Issue Brief and raw audio from interview
- How to make a podcast using audiacity or Garage Band on NYU Classes Lesson tab

Assignment:

- Conduct and record an audio interview or multiple interviews with a stakeholder affected by your Unified Campaign.
- Prepare a short (2-3 page max) policy memo or Issue brief recommending your specific policy change.

The interview and memo will be workshopped in small groups of 3. Students should give guidance on how the podcast might be edited to help convince a listener of the larger issues your campaign is trying to accomplish. Listen in particular for “magic moments” that concisely sum up the major challenges of stokehold

Week 14 – ***Unified Campaign 3 – Press Releases and Social Media***

Learning Objectives:

- To prepare for a larger unified policy campaign

Reading:

- West, D.M. “Ten Ways Social Media Can Improve Campaign Engagement and Reinvigorate American Democracy.” June 28, 2011. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/06/28-social-media-west>

Assignments:

Join Twitter and Instagram. In teams of three choose a favorite policy analyst or journalist and a favorite politician to follow on both social media formats. Read any recent press releases about them or that they wrote. Find at least three ways they are using social media in interesting and instructive ways to further engage readers (voters) that goes beyond and builds on the press releases. Present your findings as a group. Be sure to consider ways that you can emulate what they do in your own unified campaign. Include original graphical representations (word maps etc.) of qualitative data (quotes, statements and any interviews you may conduct.)

Keep editing that podcast!

***--Final Policy Campaign--***

Assignments:

Unified Policy Campaign Due The last day of classes at 5:00pm

Campaign Includes:

1. Revised Issue Brief/Memo 2-4 pages
2. Press Release— your campaign has received funding!
3. 10 Tweets
4. 5 Instagram posts
5. 8-10 minute audio essay (podcast)
6. Short reflective essay on what it would take to make this actual campaign a success. (500-750 word )