

## **ENGL 398C: Writing Case Studies & Investigative Reports**

Instructor: Joshua Buursma  
Sections 701, 801, and 1507  
Office Hours: Mon/Wed 1:30 - 3:00 PM  
Phone: 301.405.3762 (PWP Main Office)

Office: 1206 Tawes Hall  
Mon/Wed @ 3:30, 5:00, and 6:30 PM  
E-mail: jbuursma@umd.edu

*Please **contact me via e-mail** with any questions, rather than messaging me on ELMS. Expect a 24 hour turn-around for any and all correspondence, except during my office hours. Look under the **MODULES** tab on ELMS for schedule information and course links.*

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### **Course Description**

The ability to write well is one of the most highly valued skills in today's job market, and those who can demonstrate this ability have a substantial advantage over their peers both when finding work and advancing in their chosen career. Case study research and analysis is one of the fundamental tools used by professionals in disciplines as wide ranging as education, psychology, law, sociology, business, and many technical professions. The skills taught in this course will be directly relevant to your work after graduation, whether you continue onto graduate school or enter the professional world. This course therefore hopes to shape the habits and practices necessary for the writing of investigative and narrative reports, and for case study analysis. Your major writing projects will emphasize the creation of well-designed documents that speak to real-world audiences and situations. The necessary practices to complete such tasks will be emphasized in conjunction with class readings, short reflective assignments, and student collaboration.

### **Required Texts**

- Assigned readings on Canvas ELMS
- *Document-Based Cases for Technical Communication, 2nd ed.* by Roger Munger

### **Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will have made significant progress towards the following learning outcomes:

- Analyze a variety of professional rhetorical situations and produce appropriate texts in response.
- Understand the stages required to produce competent, professional writing through planning, drafting, revising, and editing.
- Identify and implement the appropriate research methods for each writing task.
- Practice the ethical use of sources and the conventions of citation appropriate to each genre.
- Write for the intended audience of a text, and design or adapt texts to readers who may differ in their familiarity with the subject matter.
- Demonstrate competence in Standard Written English, including grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, coherence, and document design (including the use of the visual) and be able to use this knowledge to revise texts.

- Produce cogent arguments that identify arguable issues, reflect the degree of available evidence, and take account of counter arguments.

## Course Requirements

The best way to improve your writing is through practice. This class will involve moderated class discussions, in-class writing assignments, regular homework, a major collaborative project, and the active critique of your own writing as well as that of your peers. You need to participate in all aspects of the course and finish all assignments in a satisfactory manner to receive a passing grade. Most required reading – genre guides, assignment prompts, model readings, etc. – will be posted to ELMS or distributed in class. The only required textbook is Roger Munger's *Document-Based Cases*, which we'll work through together as a class and from which many of the smaller assignments will be derived. In addition to material related directly to professional writing, we'll also read a selection of contemporary non-fiction to help improve the clarity of your writing in both conception and execution, and to identify models for desirable approaches to organization, research, analysis of evidence, and understanding of audience.

## Assignments & Grading

All PWP classes require a minimum of six graded assignments, comprising the equivalent of at least 25 double-spaced pages of original work per student. You cannot submit papers (in whole or in part) that you have written for other courses to fulfill a ENGL 398C assignment. All work must be written specifically for this class. The writing assignments are weighted as follows:

### MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS (70% of final grade)

Job Application	[2 pgs]	5%
Audience-specific movie review	[2 pgs]	10%
Audience-specific narrative report	[3 pgs]	10%
Evaluative report	[4 pgs]	15%
Final Group Project		30%
- <i>Audience Profile [6 pgs]</i>	<i>10%</i>	
- <i>Final Proposal [10 + pgs]</i>	<i>20%</i>	

### MINOR ASSIGNMENTS (30% of final grade)

Short Responses (8 @ 1-2 pts each)	10%
Definition for Two Audiences	2%

Munger Responses (5 @ 2 pts each)	10%
Peer Review Letters (2 @ 4 pts each)	8%
TOTAL	100%

Extra Credit: 4 points are possible, added to the total class score; no assignments are dropped.

Detailed assignment guidelines are posted on ELMS; each assignment has its own specific expectations for format and presentation. Grading rubrics will be visible on ELMS; I'll use them to explain the score I give to each assignment. **Be sure to check the PDF view (look for the small document icon) of your submitted assignment-- I also sometimes make in-line comments on the text.** The best thing you can do to improve your written assignments in this course is to bring your in-process drafts to my office hours or to the Writing Center. In general, however:

- Graded revisions are mandatory for major assignments that are returned without a grade, optional for those that earn a B- or below, and not allowed for those that earn a B or above.
- Revisions are due with the next new major assignment.
- Generally, use a readable font for main text: Times New Roman 12 pt, or Georgia 11 pt.
- Page number and your last name should appear on each page.
- Submit assignments to ELMS before midnight on their due date as DOC, DOCX, or PDF.
- Proofread all work for content, spelling, and grammar.
- Preserve all graded papers in a Dropbox, Google Drive, or similar account.
- You **MUST** submit all *major* assignments to pass the course with a C- or better.
- Successful writing will sometimes be used in class for illustrative purposes; if you're dead set against having me discuss your work in class, please let me know simply by putting a note at the top of the assignment, or via e-mail.

This scale shows how final course grades will be computed, and the equivalent letter grades for assignment score percentages (only numerical values are listed on ELMS). Fractions are rounded up to the next whole number in computing the final grade.

A (94-100) A- (90-93) B+ (87-89) B (84-86) B- (80-83) C+ (77-79) C (76-74) C- (70-73) D (60-69) F (59 or less)

As you can see, all the assignments add up to 100 points. Each assignment will receive a numerical score according to its unique rubric. Please refer to the faculty handbook for more information about UMD's grading policies. <http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/grading.htm>

### **Professional Etiquette & Participation**

One of the aims of professional writing courses is to prepare students for writing in the working world, but also to teach the types of behavior that are expected from all professionals. Your conduct in the classroom should be the same as it would be in a work environment. Turn off all

cell phones before class starts, arrive on time, and act respectfully in your interactions with others. Laptop use in class will be regulated on a class-by-class basis. And please, don't get up and leave during the middle of class (unless, of course, it's an emergency). This is a small seminar, not a lecture hall, and you cannot help but disrupt the class by deciding to take a break.

You must come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings, to make substantive contributions to class discussions, to actively participate during group workshops, and to engage fully with in-class writing assignments. Coming late to class will count as half an absence. Late papers lose a half a point for being less than 24 hours late; after that, they lose one whole point per day. After five days, the paper will not be accepted without an approved extension.

Note: I will not review drafts over e-mail, though I will answer *specific* questions about projects that you're working on. E-mails sent over the weekend (after 5 PM on Friday) will not receive a reply until the following Monday.

### **Attendance**

Since your work will require class participation and in-class writing assignments, consistent attendance is vital to your success in this class. If you miss more than four classes, you are required to conference with me to discuss your future in the class. Habitual absence (6 or more classes) will lead to a 3-point reduction in your final class score and, in severe circumstances, failure for the course. *I will never ask, nor will I need to see, any documentation* unless you have exceeded four absences. Missing a required conference counts as an absence.

In the event of illness or emergency, please notify me immediately. If you do not keep me informed of your situation in a timely manner, pleas and excuses toward the end of semester will fall on deaf ears. I can only help those who are willing to help themselves. If you do have to miss class for any reason, find out what you missed from a classmate or consult the notes on ELMS; *do not e-mail me asking for a summary of what you missed.*

Attendance in this course is mandatory. Much of what we do this semester will be collaborative, and it's difficult to engage in successful discourse with your classmates if they are not there. Here are the policies for specific situations:

*Unexcused Absences:* You may take four days of no-questions-asked absence this semester for both the expected (i.e., being the best man in your brother's wedding) and the unexpected (i.e., a flat tire). If you take a no-questions-asked absence, however, you are still responsible for whatever material was covered in class. If a major scheduled grading event (assignment due, in-class work, peer review, etc.) is scheduled for that class period, and you don't show up and don't have a university-sanctioned excuse (see below), then you will lose those points.

*Excused Absences:* The University excuses absences for your own illness or the illness of an immediate family member, for your participation in university activities at the request of University authorities, for religious observance, and for compelling circumstance beyond your control. Documentation is required for all excused absences beyond the four free absences listed

above. If you have an anticipated excused absence, please let me know in at least two weeks in advance.

*Absence from more than one week of class because of the same illness:* You must provide written documentation of the illness from the health care provider who made the diagnosis. No diagnostic information shall be given. The provider must verify dates of treatment and indicate the time frame during which you were unable to meet academic responsibilities.

*Non-consecutive medically necessitated absences from more than a single class:* Such absences may be excused provided you submit written documentation for each absence as described above, verifying the dates of treatment during which you were unable to meet your academic responsibilities. However, as also noted above, if you miss too many classes for any reason, you will probably find the course difficult if not impossible to complete. You are technically eligible to make up work, but in practice students are rarely able to do so.

*Tardiness:* In the professional world tardiness is not tolerated. However, this campus is large, and another instructor may keep you late. So if you do arrive late on occasion, do not disrupt class, and let me know in the first week if you anticipate ongoing conflicts. Remember that it is your responsibility to catch up on your own time, not on class time. Thus, two late arrivals (or unexplained early departures) will convert to one absence.

## **Course Evaluations**

In addition to the University's online system, the Professional Writing Program uses its own paper evaluations that will be distributed during the last two weeks of the semester. These paper evaluations provide our program with additional information that is specific to our classes. Your participation in the evaluation of courses through CourseEvalUM is a responsibility you hold as a student member of our academic community. Your feedback is confidential and important to the improvement of teaching and learning at the University as well as to the tenure and promotion process. Please go directly to the website ([www.courseevalum.umd.edu](http://www.courseevalum.umd.edu)) to complete your evaluations once you receive notification from the university, typically in the last two weeks of the semester.

## **Academic Integrity**

You must cite and document all of your sources, all the time, in every assignment, whether you're quoting directly or merely paraphrasing. By professional and academic standards, plagiarism is plagiarism, with very little wiggle room (though each field has its own standards; we'll discuss this in the class). For the purposes of this class, instances of plagiarism that are the result of misunderstanding academic or professional standards may be penalized as errors but not considered violations of academic integrity. However, these instances are actually quite rare. More often, plagiarism involves outright lying, when a student tries to pass off another writer's work as their own. The penalty for this kind of deliberate deception on any major assignment will be to possibly receive an "F" in the course and face possible dismissal from the University.

## **Resources & Disabilities**

Several campus resources are available to help you with your writing assignments. *Please see me with in the first two weeks of class if you have a documented disability.*

- The Career Center <http://www.education.umd.edu/studentinfo/careerservices/>

The Career Center can help you with job search advice, career counseling, and other career-related questions.

- The Writing Center <http://www.english.umd.edu/programs/WritCenter/>

The writing center can help you to improve your written assignments, determine strategies for revision, and highlight recurrent grammatical errors.

### **Grading Overview (General Guidelines)**

*Each assignment has its own specific guidelines and its own rubric, as well as audience-based standards that will be specific to your own chosen writing projects and their rhetorical situations. These are just basic, overall standards.*

**C:** Average. No, really, C means average. It's not necessarily a punitive grade: you fulfilled all the assignment requirements in readable prose with an adequate document design. There are only a few significant problems with the basic features of your project. Your writing's purpose or argument, however, is unoriginal and makes only a perfunctory effort to address a real-world audience outside the class. The scope of your research is adequate, but your evidence has mostly been selected for convenience's sake rather than with your audience in mind.

**B:** An ambitious, well-written, and carefully argued piece with a clean, reader-friendly document design. Your writing hasn't quite reached all of its own goals, but it makes a serious effort to be relevant to the real-world audience you're writing for. Clear, readable style, free of any significant errors in mechanics, organization, or citation. Your deployment and presentation of research is consistently clear and your treatment of these sources (though sometimes oversimplified) is credible. The scope of your project is plausible and well-suited to both your chosen audience and to your own level of expertise.

**A:** A lively, fresh, deftly executed piece of writing that puts forward a challenging, original idea. This work would be taken seriously by your target audience; it meets its own high ambitions, and the writing is not only clear and precise but also a (relative) pleasure to read.

**D/F:** Your project does not meet the basic requirements of the assignment. Serious errors appear consistently, from argument and organization to basic mechanics. You have not written for a real-world audience. "D" papers may contain a few effective fragments; "F" papers contains none.

**+/- :** Please note that a plus or minus signifies some modification to the above characterizations. For instance, a C+ paper may be a C paper with one exceptional passage, or be built on a highly concept but executed in an unremarkable way. It does not mean that your

paper was “on the cusp” or that only a few errors need to be corrected. B+ papers are not on the verge of being A- papers; they are B p