HS240b
Professional Writing
Syllabus: Fall Semester 2017
Tuesdays, 12:15-1:45
Room: TBD
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Office hours: By Appointment

UNIVERSITY NOTICES

1. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have an accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

2. You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty are subject to possible judicial action. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about these policies, please ask me.

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person – be it a world expert or your roommate – without proper acknowledgement of the source. This means you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, data or ideas found in published volumes, on the Internet, or created by another student. If you are in doubt, ask for clarification.

This course meets Tuesdays from 12:15pm to 1:45pm during the Fall semester. During Fall Module I the class will meet on September 5, September 12, 19, 26, October 10, 17 and 24 (last session during exam week). The course continues during Module II on the same day and time. The dates are October 31, November 7, 14, 21 and 28, and December 5 and 12 (last session is during exam week).

This course is required for first year students in the MA/SID program who do not meet the minimum required scoring on the writing assessment. MA/MS and SIDCO students may also enroll if they do not waive out of the class.

This is a 2-credit course.
COURSE INFORMATION

Course description:
The course uses on hands-on exercises to improve students’ professional writing while also building skills in reading comprehension and critical analysis of important texts in development studies. Students will develop their professional writing skills by working with a variety of formats used in development work, including memos, policy briefs, consultant reports, executive summaries and abstracts, grant proposals, critical essays, and research papers.

Regular writing assignments and online resources will allow students to practice basic writing skills such as structuring sentences and paragraphs, creating effective transitions, developing logical arguments, and using clear and concise language. The course aims to provide students with tools to continuously improve their professional writing while also strengthening their knowledge of major debates and issues in the development field.

All required readings are posted on Latte, available online, or on reserve at the Brandeis library.

Readings and written assignments may be added and/or substituted, depending on the progress of the class. Students will be advised well in advance of any changes.

Common Types of Professional Writing
  o Memo
  o Policy brief
  o Consultant report
  o Executive summary and abstract
  o Grant proposal
  o Critical essay
  o Research paper

Topics in Professional Writing
  o Overall structure, cohesion, and coherence of written product
  o English grammar and style conventions
  o Clarity and concision
  o Proper use of quotations and citations, when to cite and how often (guarding against unintentional plagiarism)
  o Strengthening your narrative voice and not just repeating the ideas and assumptions of other authors
  o Timing, or when to introduce certain main points in the paper or within a paragraph
  o Presenting your views objectively through the use of data and evidence while advancing an argument

Core competency statement:
This course teaches concepts and skills that have been identified as core competencies for a
degree in SID, particularly in regard to critical thinking and professional writing (#10) and, secondarily, increasing basic literacy in the historical and current debates on the meaning and goals of sustainable development (#1).

**Sustainable development statement:**
This semester-long course has an immediate practical application of improving the expository writing skills of first-year SID students, enabling them to perform well in other SID courses. The skills will also be useful for students when they develop their Masters papers in the second year. Beyond that, the course will develop students’ skills in reading comprehension, critical thinking and oral expression – essential for development professionals in all types of organizations and institutions. The course will provide students with online resources that they can use after the semester ends to improve their basic language skills throughout their Heller career and beyond. Readings will include a variety of texts by key development thinkers and practitioners, heightening students’ substantive knowledge in the field.

**Gender and diversity statement:**
The course will enhance students ability to think critically, present information and write in a manner that is sensitive to differing gender roles and inter- and intra-group relations in development work, while taking into account value systems, practices, beliefs and social relations in diverse cultures. Through assigned readings and class discussions, students will become aware that different institutions, regions, countries, traditions and groups shape development discourses. Our aim is to communicate information in ways that respect diversity, promote tolerance and increase mutual understanding. This can lay the groundwork for building consensus on social justice goals that improve the wellbeing of women and other vulnerable groups.

**Course requirements:**
1. Attendance at all sessions.
2. Preparation of all readings and weekly writing assignments.
3. Participation in class discussions.
4. Helpfulness to other students.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:
- Attendance and participation (15%)
- In-class exercises (25%)
- Writing assignments (60%)

Specific grading criteria for the writing assignments are:
- Is your English grammar correct?
- Are your sentences complete?
- Do you have a clear topic sentence in each paragraph?
- Do your ideas flow smoothly, and in logical order?
- Do you use evidence to support your points?
- Does your paper follow the assigned format? (e.g. memo, policy brief, critical essay)
- Do you demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts or ideas from various authors by putting them in your own words and not just repeating technical jargon or quotes?
- Do you use citations and quotations properly?
Do you achieve an in-depth analysis?
Are your conclusions and recommendations a logical outcome of your analysis?

CLASS SESSIONS

Requirements:
Reading and writing assignments based on:
- Articles and online sources for writing techniques and tips
- Articles and books on development theory and practice
- Articles from peer-reviewed development journals – Journal of Human Development and Capabilities; Development in Practice, etc.
- Reports from development organizations such as World Bank, United Nations and various UN agencies
- Past SID Master’s Papers and SID Program Guidelines

All writing assignments are due as indicated. Please post all assignments on LATTE by the due date and time and bring hardcopies with you to class, if requested. The instructor will make every effort to return papers within one week after they are submitted.

All written assignments should use the following format:
Font: Times New Roman font size 12
Spacing: 1.5
Margins: 1” on each side

Texts and Resources for the Course:
Scholarly Writing, Case Study Guidelines, and General Reference Works for Professional Writing


The Writing Center at UNC – Chapel Hill. http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/

The Purdue Owl (n.d.). Online Writing Lab. Retrieved from https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/

Selected Development Texts


Reports and Papers from Major International Development Institutions


Class Schedule:
To build students’ skills in reading comprehension, writing and oral communication as related to development, class sessions will focus on three types of activities: (1) discussion of assigned texts and written responses; (2) presentation and discussion of key topics such as avoiding plagiarism and the elements of memos, policy briefs and other common forms of development writing; and (3) group work and interactive exercises to teach and reinforce basic skills.

Week 1 (September 5): Introduction to Professional Writing
This session will focus on the basic goals of the course and expected learning outcomes. We will review the common pitfalls of academic and professional writing and discuss why language matters for development and development practitioners.

Required Reading:

Practical Topic: “Preventing, Contextualizing and Avoiding Plagiarism.” See online resources: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/3/33/

Writing Assignment for Week 2: Read Pinker’s article carefully. In a maximum of two pages, argue either in favor or against the following proposition: “Classic style is the best way to write about development.” Write this in the form of a (minimum) 5-paragraph ‘argumentative’ essay. See (See OWL site on essay writing: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/1/).

Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday, Sept. 11. Be prepared to discuss your paper during class on Sept. 12.

Week 2 (September 12): Writing a Professional Memo
Students will review the format and structure of professional memos.


University of Maryland University College. How to Write the Perfect Memo. http://polaris.umuc.edu/ewc/web/memo.html
Assignment for Week 3: You are the director of a development NGO that has chosen to focus on one of the 17 SDGs. Write a one-page memo to your staff about why the organization has selected that particular goal, and what you expect them to do (e.g. develop and communications, fundraising or implementation plan. Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday, Sept. 18.

Week 3 (September 19) Perfecting the Memo Format
We will review the elements of an effective memo.

Required Reading:

Writing Assignment for Week 5: You are the Minister of Planning in your country. Write a 2-3 page memo to Parliament arguing why (or why not) the SDGs should be adopted by your government. Paper must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday, October 9.

Week 4 (September 26) Analyzing and Writing Effective Policy Briefs
We will review the key elements of effective policy briefs.

Required Readings
Results 4 Development. How to Produce a Policy Brief. (On Latte)


Assignment for Week 7: Gather quantitative and qualitative information on a development topic that interests you and prepare a three- to four-page policy brief. You may refer to material covered in other classes. Assignment must posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday October 23.

Week 5 (October 10): Further Work on Policy Briefs
Students will continue the discussion of the elements of effective policy briefs in the broader framework of tools for influencing policy engagement.

Required Reading:
Available online:  http://www.roma.odi.org/introduction.html

**Week 6 (October 17): Introduction to Grant Writing**
This session will present an introduction to grant writing for development practitioners.

*Online resources:*
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/981/1/

http://fundingportal.unc.edu/proposal-writing/

**Assignment due for Week 7:** Complete the free online webinar and online course on introductions to grant writing sponsored by The Foundation Center and available at: http://grantspace.org/training/courses/introduction-to-proposal-writing. Read at least two sample documents at http://grantspace.org/tools/sample-documents.

**Assignment due for Week 8:** Based on what you have learned about grant writing, write a sample cover letter or donation request letter to introduce your project to a potential donor. For format see https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/723/03/

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/999/1/

*Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday October 30.*

**Week 7 (October 24): Reflections on First Module: Reviews of Concepts, Formats and Writing Skills**
This session will review the material covered to date. Students will identify their ongoing professional writing challenges.

**Week 8 (October 31): Briefing Papers and Reports**
This session will review the elements of technical reports and the qualities of good abstracts. You will learn how different formats and styles are used in different fields (e.g. humanities vs. social sciences).

*Online resource: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/656/1/*

*Required reading:*

**Assignment for Week 9:** Carefully analyze the key elements of *An Economy for the 99%.* How is the report organized? Write an executive summary or abstract of Chapter 1. *Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday November 6.*

**Week 9 (November 7): Essay Writing**
This session will review the common types of essay writing: expository; descriptive; narrative;
and argumentative (See OWL site: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/1/). We will discuss which types of essays are most suited to development work.

**Required Reading:**

**Assignment for Week 10:** Write a (minimum) five paragraph essay (using any one of the five types of essay writing) on the ideas discussed in Edward’s article. *Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday, November 13.*

**Week 10 (November 14): Further Work on Essay Writing**
Discussion and training will continue on different essay formats.

**Required Reading:**

**Assignment due for Week 11:** Write another five-paragraph essay using a different type of essay format. Base your essay on the ideas in Watkin’s lecture. *Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday, November 20.*

**Week 11 (November 21): Introduction to the SID MA Paper and Proposal**
We will review the guidelines for the SID MA paper and proposal. Students will learn about the different options available for the paper and the second year.

**Required Reading:**
*SID Second Year Handbook (2017-2018).*

**Assignment for Week 13:** Students will start work on a draft proposal for their second year. *Students will have two weeks to complete the draft proposal, which must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday, December 4.*

**Week 12 (November 28): Elements of a Research Paper: Literature Review**
This session focuses on how to write a literature review.

**Required Readings:**


**Assignment for Week 13:** Students will continue work on their draft proposals. *Assignments must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Monday December 4.*
**Week 13 (December 5): Writing Clinic**
Students bring their individual writing issues and questions to class. Students may bring papers from other classes as examples.

*Optional Assignment for Week 14:* Students may rewrite any of their papers for the course. *Rewritten papers must be posted on Latte by 12:00pm on Tuesday December 12. Only the higher grade will be counted.*

**Week 14 (December 12): Reflections on Professional Writing**
Students reflect on the skills they need to be effective writers, readers and speakers.