



ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of English
ENGL 378/MTHEL 300 (004)
Professional Communications in Statistics and Actuarial Science
Winter 2020
MW 10:00-11:20, SJ1 2009

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jesse Hutchison

Office: Sweeney Hall, Room 2112

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-3:30pm, or by appointment

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Course Description

Clear and effective communication is a crucial component of any field, particularly in actuarial science. This course endeavours to provide you with the tools you will need in order to successfully deliver material to both experts and non-experts. This means improving on the basic fundamentals of writing. In the first part of the course, then, we will discuss various strategies to write in a way that is professional, critical, concise, and precise. You will learn how to craft information for different audiences, from specialists, with whom you can use more technical and specialized language, to non-specialists, to whom you will have to relay difficult concepts in a way that is accessible. We will also emphasize the importance of teamwork as your final assignment will be to produce a major group project on a subject of your choice. In working towards this final project, we will consider the significance of research, peer editing, and the necessity of strong public speaking skills.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Identify and synthesize arguments and relevant points from published material
- B. Be aware of different audiences who require statistical information and be able to communicate effectively to those different audiences
- C. Write critically, concisely, and persuasively
- D. Work collaboratively with a team to produce a well-organized and professional document

Required Text

There is no required textbook for the class; however, I will be putting up material on LEARN for you to read.

Course Requirements and Assessment

| Assessment | Date of Evaluation | Weighting |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Attendance and Participation | | 15% |
| Citation Assignment | January 20 | 5% |
| Grammar Assignment | January 27 | 5% |
| Summary/Criticism | February 3 | 5% |
| Blog Entry | February 12 | 10% |
| Memo Assignment | February 24 | 10% |
| Oral Presentation | March 4 | 10% |
| Written Proposal | March 18 | 10% |
| Reflection Assignment | March 30 | 5% |
| Final Team Project | April 7 | 25% |

Attendance and participation (15%): For this class, you will be evaluated in terms of your attendance as well as your contributions to the discussion. In order to participate to the full, you must be engaged in the ongoing conversation and contribute thoughtfully. Please come to the class on time and avoid any potential distractions (meaning no social media, texting or having off-topic chats with friends).

Citation Assignment (5%): For this assignment, I will place a text on Learn that you will examine in order to determine what is cited properly and what is cited improperly, as per our class discussions. The citation assignment will be submitted to the Learn dropbox by 11:59 on **January 20**

Grammar Assignment (5%): This assignment asks you to point out the grammatical errors (sentence fragments, comma splices, misuse of semi-colons, etc.) in a text that I will place on Learn. The grammar assignment will be submitted to the Learn dropbox by 11:59 on **January 27**

Summary/Criticism (5%): For this assignment, you will read a recent article from an academic journal and provide in point form the thesis statement of the article, two or three of its most central points, and the essay's own argument about what makes it unique or different from other analyses on the topic. In five or six prose sentences (not point form), you will also provide either a criticism of a flaw in the article's logic (or argument) or simply something it has not

taken into account or discuss how the article could be improved in some significant way. The summary/criticism will be submitted to the Learn dropbox by 11:59 on **February 3**.

Blog Entry (10%): You will pair up with a partner in class and write a blog profile on them and specifically their interest in their particular field of study. You will create a 300-400 word blog entry in which discuss your subject's interests for a broad, general non-specialist audience. Make sure to make your blog visually appealing; feel free to add pictures and links. This is an opportunity to be a bit more creative so while you still want to make sure that your writing is clear and grammatically correct (because poor grammar will lose a non-specialist audience too), you can experiment with a looser, informal style of writing. The blog entry will be submitted to the Learn dropbox by 11:59pm on **February 12**.

Memo assignment (10%): For this assignment, I will give you a topic on which you will do a bit of research. Once you have completed the research on your topic, you will craft a memo to a potential boss or policy-maker (a semi-specialist) to whom you will make a recommendation on the basis of your assessment of the evidence. More details will be provided. The memo will be submitted to the Learn dropbox by 11:59pm on **February 24**.

Final Team Project (30%): Collaborating with team members, you will produce a research document or white paper related to actuarial science or statistics that is written for a semi-specialist or non-specialist audience. The project should make use of legitimate and authoritative sources and incorporate data and/or information from at least five legitimate sources. Each member of the group will contribute approximately 600-650 words of the document and you need to make it clear in the final project who wrote what section. You will also work together to review and edit the material so that it is consistent in terms of content, style, and formatting. The final grade will consider the application of the research and depth of analysis, the adherence to formatting requirements, the appropriateness of the style for the audience, and the overall clarity and concision of the writing. Because the work is collaborative in nature, the intention is that every student will receive the same grade. However, I will give the option if you wish to be graded independently. The project will be a work in progress from our formation of groups on February 12 to the final submission on April 7. You will give a group presentation on March 4 where you will pitch your topic (see more info below). You will submit an official written proposal on March 18 (see more info below). And there will be various classes devoted to working on the project with my guidance. A team member should submit the assignment to the dropbox by 11:59pm on **April 7**

Oral Presentation (10%): You will give an informal 8-10 minute presentation on your topic on **March 4**. This presentation should allow time for everyone to talk for roughly a minute or two. This presentation is a pitch for your project to a semi-specialist and non-specialist audience where you describe the importance of your topic and how a research project on it might be useful. A team member will submit the presentation notes or slides as a single document on Learn on the day of your presentation.

Written Proposal (10%): Your team will submit a carefully written proposal. For this proposal, you will answer three key questions: what will be done, how will it be done, and why should it be done? The proposal will also include a literature review, meaning a description of the research work that you intend to include and how you intend to use it. This proposal is in many ways meant to be a helpful way to get you thinking about the final project. In that respect, you are not bound to what you write in the proposal. In fact, my comments will potentially allow you to re-consider various elements of the final team project. The proposal will be submitted by a team member on Learn on **March 18**.

Reflection Assignment (5%): For this assignment, you are asked to honestly and critically evaluate your experiences in this class. Discuss your own contributions to assignments, class discussions, and your team. What is something that you feel you improved on and what might be something you need to work on further? Consider as well whether the course has helped you beyond the confines of the class. Reflections should be between (350-500 words) and will be written in class on **March 30**.

Group Assignments

When working on a group assignment, a Group Assignment Checklist must be completed and submitted with the assignment:

https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/sites/ca.arts/files/uploads/files/group_assignment_disclosure.pdf

Late Work

The penalty for a late assignment is 2% per day, including weekend days. This will be incurred in all cases except certified emergencies. Papers more than ten days late will not be accepted, and a mark of zero will be given for the assignments.

A doctor's note is required to avoid a late penalty, and it should document serious illness on and for the period directly preceding the due date for assignments, or on the scheduled dates of exams. In cases of personal matters such as mental health concerns, I am very sympathetic but I am also unable to properly evaluate these cases. If you need an extension on work for such issues, it is crucial to go to AccessAbility and have them evaluate your case. They can then contact me if they believe you require alternate accommodations for assignments. At that point, I am always happy to help the student in any way that I can.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is crucial for both your attendance and participation grade. A doctor's note is required to avoid attendance marks being docked for an absence. Similar to the late work information, if there are personal issues such as mental health concerns that make attending class difficult, you will need to go to AccessAbility to have them evaluate your case and they can contact me if they believe you require alternate accommodations. If you miss a class for unavoidable circumstances, please connect with a classmate to discuss the material that was

covered during your absence.

Appointments and email

I am always happy to meet with students to discuss course matters, including difficulties with the material or upcoming assignments. Please feel free to visit my office hours, make an appointment to meet with me, or send me an email.

If you send me an email, please wait 24 hours before sending me a reminder. I may not be able to respond right away, or I may be looking into the matter on your behalf, but I will get back to you as soon as possible. If you have not received a response after 24 hours, or 48 hours on a weekend, please email me again. Please note that mail from some external email servers, such as Hotmail or Yahoo, may be bounced by the university server.

Email should be reserved for relatively simple communication matters, such as brief questions or to make an appointment. If your query will require a longer conversation as in, for example, the discussion of a grade or an assignment, please come see me in person. In general, I will not give out marks over email.

Electronic Device Policy

Aside from what you need to take notes, there is to be no use of electronic devices in class.

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. [Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-)

[SJUSCapproved.pdf](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties, check the Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](#), www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf.

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term, www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/.

Course Outline/Class Schedule:

January 6: Introduction, Types of Writing

January 8: Reading: "Does classroom participation improve student learning?" Murray and Lang

January 13: Style/Concision

January 15: Academic Integrity

January 20: Audience, **Citation Assignment due**

January 22: Grammar

January 27: Reading: "Are the dead taking over Facebook?", Identifying Arguments, Reading for Relevant Details, **Grammar Assignment due**

January 29: Critical Thinking

February 3: Reading: "Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with nonexpert audiences," Michael F. Dahlstrom **Summary/Criticism due**

February 5: Blogs, Blog Interviews

February 10: Memos

February 12: Final Reports, White Papers, forming of Groups, **Blog due**

February 24: Presentation Tips, Presentation Practice, **Memo due**

February 26: Research Tips

March 2: Proposal Writing Tips, Presentation Practice

March 4: **Presentations**

March 9: Rhetoric

March 11: Proposal Workshop

March 16: Peer Editing for Proposal

March 18: Common Errors, **Proposal Due**

March 23: Project Workshop

March 25: Project Workshop

March 30: In-Class Reflections, **Reflection Due**

April 1: Peer Editing for Team Project, **Final Project due April 7**