WRITING 340: ADVANCED WRITING IN THE NATURAL SCIENCES

Professor: Dr. Chris Muniz

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Class Schedule [Location]:

Office: JEF 110

Office Hours: TBD

TTh 11:00 – 12:20 PM [GFS 213]

TTh 12:30 – 1:50 PM [GFS 213]

TTh 2:00 – 3:20 PM [GFS 213]

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As you approach the culmination of your undergraduate journey, you're likely contemplating your future with a mix of anticipation and uncertainty. Regardless of your chosen path, effective communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking will be essential skills in your professional life. Whether you're heading towards a world of scientific research, technological innovation, business management, or healthcare, this course aims to prepare you for the diverse communication challenges you'll face in your post-collegiate career.

WRIT 340 is specifically designed to provide you with guided, evaluated practice in the forms of written communication commonly used by professionals in scientific and technical fields. These skills are consistently ranked as crucial by industry leaders, academic institutions, and government agencies across all sectors. My goal is to help you develop and refine these abilities, giving you a competitive edge as you enter your chosen field.

Please note, while this is a Natural Sciences section, the course is designed to be valuable for all students, regardless of your major. The assignments focus on genres and skills that STEM students are likely to encounter, but they're also applicable to a wide range of disciplines. If you're not a science major, don't worry - the course is flexible enough to incorporate your unique knowledge and experiences.

Throughout the semester, we'll engage with three major writing projects that will challenge you to think critically about your chosen field, your personal development as a writer and thinker, and the broader implications of scientific communication in society. These assignments are crafted to deepen your understanding of yourself, your discipline, and your future career path, while also encouraging you to grapple with some of the bigger questions that face us as global citizens and contributors to scientific progress.

This course is built on a workshop and discussion-based model, emphasizing active participation and collaborative learning. The more you engage with the material, your peers, and the writing process, the more you'll gain from this experience. I encourage you to bring your unique perspectives, ideas, and interests to our discussions and your writing projects. By doing so, you'll not only enhance your own learning but also contribute to a rich, diverse learning environment for everyone in the class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- ✓ Adapt your writing for diverse audiences in the scientific community and beyond
- ✓ Effectively communicate complex ideas both orally and in writing
- ✓ Critically analyze and synthesize scientific literature
- ✓ Develop a personal writing process that enhances your communication skills
- ✓ Understand and apply the principles of ethical scientific communication

Keep in mind that this course is designed to be **highly collaborative**, mirroring the interdisciplinary nature of modern professional environments. Expect to engage in:

- ✓ Peer feedback on drafted writings
- ✓ Online and in-class discussions
- ✓ Individual consultations with the instructor (me)

This approach not only enhances your writing skills but also develops crucial teamwork and communication abilities valued across all fields.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

- Christopher Thaiss (2019). *Writing Science in the Twenty-First Century.* Broadview Press

GRADING CONTRACT:

This course uses a grading contract system aimed at reducing anxiety over individual assignment grades and encouraging focus on overall growth and learning. The contract guarantees a base grade of "B" for meeting specified requirements in attendance, participation, assignment completion, and professionalism. Higher grades are achievable through exceptional performance on the final portfolio.

Detailed terms of the contract, including provisions for missed classes or assignments, will be provided separately. This approach aims to foster a collaborative learning environment and encourage risk-taking in your writing.

Please note that no letter grades will be assigned to individual assignments throughout the semester; instead, you'll receive substantive written feedback to guide your improvement.

COURSE POLICIES:

MAJOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

We will be writing **THREE** formal Writing Projects. All projects offer opportunities to practice critical thinking and practical persuasive writing skills, the projects are tailored to address different specific audiences, each with distinct needs and varying levels of prior knowledge about your field. In the Writing Program, we coach

process but grade product. As this course is predicated upon my interaction with you as your process unfolds, please keep in mind that **I will not accept papers that have not been developed through the required drafting and conference stages.**

Writing Projects must follow the formal citation conventions you are most familiar with (APA, MLA, Chicago, Council of Sciences Editors, etc.) and include a Works Cited/References. Projects must be uploaded to Blackboard. **Do not send any work via e-mail unless asked to do so.**

Extensions on Writing Project deadlines are available only in cases of documented emergencies (e.g., medical emergencies, bereavement leave) and will not exceed one week following the class deadline. Please contact me right away if you are facing an emergency that interferes with your ability to meet a Writing Project deadline.

ANCILLARY WRITING ACTIVITIES:

Ancillary Writing Activities consist of homework assignments, in-class activities, and writing process documents. These activities are designed to help you prepare to participate in class discussion and writing workshops and keep you on pace with each of the larger, more formal Writing Projects.

PARTICIPATION:

Writing 340 will be conducted primarily as a *workshop course* rather than as a lecture. Please come to class **fully prepared** and ready to contribute your voice. Active participation includes engaging in small-group activities, large-group discussions, and peer review. It also involves listening closely to your peers.

FINAL PORTFOLIO:

For our final assignment of the semester, you will submit a "Final Portfolio" that showcases your best work and demonstrates your growth as a writer. The portfolio will consist of:

1. Your most polished version of either Writing Project 2 *(Research Review)* **or** Writing Project 3 *(Communicating Science to the Non-Scientist essay*) - your choice
2. A reflective essay (800-1000 words) discussing your development as a writer throughout the semester
3. An oral presentation (5-7 minutes) based on your Writing Project 3 essay

In order to submit a final portfolio, you must:
1. Have submitted all three major writing projects
2. Completed all required ancillary writing activities
3. Be in good standing according to the grading contract before portfolio week

This final portfolio allows you to demonstrate your mastery of written and oral scientific communication, as well as your ability to reflect critically on your own writing process. The oral presentation component will give you valuable experience in translating your written work into an engaging verbal format, a crucial skill in many scientific and professional contexts.

Detailed guidelines for each component of the portfolio will be provided later in the semester. This culminating assignment is designed to synthesize the skills you've developed throughout the course and prepare you for future academic and professional communication challenges.

CONFERENCES:

Throughout the semester, we'll have one-on-one conferences to discuss your writing projects. These meetings will be scheduled in advance, with multiple time slots available to accommodate your schedule. During these conferences, we'll address specific issues in your essays, refine your arguments, and strategize for effective drafting and revision.

Please note: Missing a scheduled conference without notice will count as an absence. If you need to cancel a conference, please email me at least two hours before the scheduled time as a courtesy.

COMMUNICATION AND EMAIL ASSISTANCE:

Check your email and Brightspace regularly for announcements and course materials. **All announcements and classroom materials will be posted on Brightspace.** For questions about missed classes or general course content, consult your classmates first. Email me only for personal concerns or issues requiring my specific attention. Please allow 24 hours for email responses (longer on weekends).

TENTATIVE DEADLINES:

September 8	Writing Project 1 (Writing and Science: Your History)
October 9	Writing Project 2 (Research Review)
November 17	Writing Project 3 (Communicating Science to the Non-Scientist)
November 19 - December 5	Oral Presentations
December 8	Final Portfolio Due

Other Important Dates:

October 10-11	Fall Recess (No Class)
November 27-29	Thanksgiving Holiday (No Class)
December 6	Last day of classes

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu
Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers / notetakers / interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710
campussupport.usc.edu
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101
diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu
Non-emergency assistance or information.