Course Overview
Hello! Welcome to Communications Elements.

My name is Josh Babb, and I will be your professor for this course. Let me start by saying that your comprehension and mastery of the materials we are going to cover over the next ten weeks is my primary focus and concern. Your learning experience - via this program - is unique and certainly presents its own advantages and challenges. However, I have worked in this environment as well as learned and excelled in it, so I know what you are all endeavoring to do and I admire it! I am both excited and eager to get started.

Before we get into the details of the course, I think it would be prudent to fully introduce myself – so that you have a good idea who I am and how I can help you in this course and beyond. I have been involved in politics both in Washington, D.C. as well as in the state of Texas for a number of years, holding paid and volunteer positions in the campaign world, and for the past several years working on Capitol Hill. No matter my experience, I am continually reminded of the need for flexibility, a desire to learn, and the willingness to continually adapt to a changing field. Communication is as wide a subject as you will ever find in both politics and the PR world, one which requires constant adaptation and the willingness to always be a student.

In my view, the communications element in politics is fundamental to any student seeking to become a political professional. Regardless of your position – paid or unpaid, executive or entry level - understanding communications will always be job #1. Unfortunately, communications and the strategy behind it is a very broad, if not imprecise, field. Put five political pros in a room, and ask the question, "what would you teach in a course entitled Communications Elements?" and it’s likely you could get at least TEN different answers.

This course will focus on a mix of the basic elements of communications as well as the strategy and understanding of current communication situations going on around each of you in the news. In my view, understanding how to communicate effectively requires a working knowledge of the basic principles used in research, advertising, and marketing - and how they can be applied across the spectrum.

As a student, the main concerns I had coming into a class were always “what can I expect and what kind of workload will I be asked to juggle?” – both of which are fair questions! With regards to this class, your expectations could be summarized in one word – writing – and lots of it. Rest assured, however, you will not be asked to write simply to fill a quota. Rather you will asked to perform crucial written analytical assignments that will stretch your ability and force you to manage your time wisely, much like you will (or already do) should you enter a profession in the field of strategic communications.

You will also be required to take an active role in the class by participating in discussions with your classmates and myself each week in class. Your participation is a small but key component
of your grade, however - failure to participate will both negatively affect your experience as well as your grade.

Thank you. I sincerely hope you enjoy this class and find value in the material and assignments you are about to undertake. Best of luck to all of you!

Course Description
The purpose of this course is to educate and engage you in the formulation of communication or more specifically political or advocacy communication, which political and advocacy professionals use to win support for their issues, causes, and candidates. You will be asked to immerse yourself in the formulation of differing types of political communication, utilizing deadlines and differing situations to prepare you for multiple environments where your communication skills might be tested.

The lectures, reading assignments, class discussions, and required coursework will allow you to examine communication elements at their most basic level. Your ability to write, and more importantly to write well, will guide your time in this program and in your career for years to come. In politics as well as many other organizations, how you communicate your message is often times more important than the message itself.

Course Objectives
As a result of participating in the learning activities in this course, you will be able to:

- Lean on tested and honed skills to communicate your strategy and message quickly and effectively.
- Develop a political communications strategy that includes the design of a comprehensive communications plan and the drafting of various forms of campaign or advocacy communications.
- Apply tested marketing and advertising principles in the development and execution of political communications.
- Assess the effectiveness of messages for electoral campaigns, advocacy campaigns, and other political situations.

Completion of this course will provide a foundation from which to design and develop political advocacy communications.

Learning Objectives
Upon the successful completion of this course, you will:

- Be adept at writing effective public relations and public affairs communications including news releases, newsletters, op-ed articles, and speeches, for different targeted audiences. This is an advanced writing course, and making you a better, more competent writer is the primary goal.
- Be aware of the paramount need for accuracy, of only using facts that can be verified.
• Have a solid grounding in the mechanics of writing, including correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.
• Understand the ethical and legal issues facing public relations and public affairs professionals today.
• Understand the importance of adherence to a basic writing style through use of The Associated Press Stylebook.
• Be a good editor so that you can improve your own writing and—whether editing your own production or the work of others—be able to think critically to find holes in logic or unanswered questions.
• Be familiar with the role of journalists and understand how to gain their trust and meet their requirements.

Course Requirements
In this class, your written work will carry the majority of your grade, however, your participation and active involvement is highly important to both your experience as well as your classmates. You will be expected to draft a substantial amount of written work - all of which will test your ability to write effectively - over the course of the ten weeks. Each assignment will represent an opportunity for critical analysis and strategic thinking. You will be asked to write effectively, efficiently, and with brevity where required.

In order to keep you abreast of some of the issues we will be working on and the coursework you will be addressing, you need to be prepared to review the following three news sources on a weekly basis:

• The New York Times
• The Washington Post
• The Wall Street Journal

I do not expect you to read these news sources cover to cover, but you should thumb through each regularly and be ready to apply current events to the discussions in class. In a workable format, this means that you should have read one of the three papers at least two or three times each week. Discussions and class participation will be partially based on information found in these daily news sources.

Textbooks and Materials
Required Textbooks
**Reading List**
The following list contains specified readings for each week of the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 27th</strong></td>
<td><strong>READING 1.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read Chapter 1 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read pg. 1-10 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>READING 1.2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read Chapters 3 and 4 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read pg. 30-33 and 65-69 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>June 3rd</strong></td>
<td><strong>READING 2.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read Chapter 2 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>READING 2.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read Chapter 5 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read 76-86 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>READING 2.3</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Read Chapter 6 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Read pg. 41-64 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>June 10th</strong></td>
<td>• Read pg. 87-94 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read pg. 177-196 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The following readings are written by David Shipley, the former op-ed editor of The New York Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Editing an Op-ed by David Shipley, 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How to Submit an Op-ed.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### June 17th
- Read Chapters 7 (optional) and 8 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.
- Read pg. 87-98 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.

### June 24th
- Read Chapter 9 in Public Relations Writing: The Essentials of Style and Format, 7th edition.
- Read pg. 70-75 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.

### July 1st
- No Readings Required

### July 8th

### July 15th
- Read pg. 16-20 and 105-119 in Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More, 3rd edition.
- Read "Why Twitter Matters for Media Organizations" by Alan Rusbridger, Editor-in-Chief of the Guardian newspaper of London.
- The Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism published its annual State of the Media on March 21, 2013. Please review the following three sections of this report:
  - The overview of the main report at: [http://stateofthemedia.org/2013/overview-5/](http://stateofthemedia.org/2013/overview-5/)

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**Supplementary Requirements**
To keep up with important issues facing the media and, by extension, public relations and political management professionals, read the following columns, blogs and Twitter posts, which are readily available:
- Twitter feeds from Howard Kurtz (The Daily Beast columnist) and Rich Galen (writer of mullings.com)
- The Public Reader column of The New York Times by Margaret Sullivan
• The Fact Checker by Glenn Kessler in The Washington Post, who awards "Pinocchios" for inaccurate statements made by public figures, something your potential clients will want to avoid!

Optional Online Resources
• Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics
• Introduction to the Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics
• The PRSA Code of Ethics
• How to submit an op-ed article to The New York Times
• Washington Post Opinions Frequently Asked Questions, including How to Submit an op-ed article "Statement of Ethics" of the American Marketing Association

Grading Scale
For any graded learning activity (i.e., assignments, discussions, etc.), you will be assigned a letter grade based upon the following distribution:

The table below shows the grading scale for this course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A−</td>
<td>90–92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89–87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86–83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B−</td>
<td>82–80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79–77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>76–73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C−</td>
<td>72–70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>69 &amp; Below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An "I" grade will be granted if one fails to complete a small, discrete amount of work due to circumstances the facilitator deems legitimate and sufficient, if your prior performance has been satisfactory, and you have a plan for completing the work. The "I" will convert to an "F" if the student does not submit the missing work by the agreed-upon submission deadline. All assignments will be graded in terms of the quality of the writing, analysis, and content.

Note: This is not a graduate course where a B grade is the automatic baseline; lower grades will be awarded where merited. Hard work will be rewarded, but there are a number of assignments and quick deadlines in rapid succession. The intent of the assignments is not to overwhelm you, but to force you to act quickly, efficiently and effectively.
Course Grading

Your final grade for this course will be derived from the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Writing e-Portfolio</td>
<td>Drafts are due each week with final portfolio due at the end of the course.</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Assignments</td>
<td>3 Assignments</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation/Current Events</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assignment Descriptions

**Class Participation/Current Events**

Each week, as a part of our regular class time we will have a discussion related to a media issue of which each of you should be able to contribute to a fruitful discussion on – either a key communication issue highlighted in the press the week before or one brought up by a guest speaker during the class. You are responsible for bring with you at minimum one (1) article or news story – something communication related based on current events, such as how the media covers and comments on a major event or how a company, individual, or group responds to a communication crisis.

Any of these issues may be highlighted in the blogs produced by Andrew Alexander, the ombudsman of the *Washington Post*, and Howard Kurtz, the former *Washington Post* media correspondent now writing for the *Daily Beast*, or by other writers. Links to Alexander’s and Kurtz's blogs are readily available on the web. Class participation means first and foremost being present in class and next bring a current event to the table for discussion. Finally, it means being able to thoughtfully answer questions posed by classmates as well as adding depth to the conversation.

We’ll also discuss the previously completed readings as well as draft work for your final portfolio. The purpose of class time is to provide context to the work you are doing each week as well as the readings – all of which is put in context through current events, such as how the media covers and comments on a major event, as well as guest speakers from the industry.

**Written Submissions**

The written submissions are designed to provide you an early opportunity to have your writing edited by the facilitators and to receive feedback on suggestions for making improvements in subsequent assignments. The facilitators will grade the papers on the basis of clarity, organization and grammar. The assignments will count 10% each toward the final grade as follows. Thus, the three written submissions will together count for 30% of the final grade.
• **Submitting Assignments on Time**  
  It is important not only academically but also professionally for communicators to meet their deadlines. Thus, assignments turned in late – with the exception of very special circumstances for which the facilitators must be advised in advance – will be penalized by a one-third letter grade deduction for each day an assignment is turned in late, e.g., A to A-, A- to B+. B+ to B, etc.

**Final Writing e-Portfolio**  
The major assignment for this course is the creation of a writing e-portfolio. For this project, you will choose a real-world public relations or public affairs project for a company or organization—or for a political candidate or cause—that will provide the context and content for what you will write. This project will help you to understand the need to have strategic goals for what you write and the basics of project planning and goal setting.

In choosing a project, you will be asked to pick one that has a goal or goals that you think you can reasonably help to achieve with the application of basic public relations or public affairs strategies and tactics. To help measure and evaluate the potential impact, you should plan on something that can be done within six months to year, so don’t try to take on the world.

At a bare minimum, your project must involve working with the media for press coverage (print, broadcast, and online) and at least one other key audience for a particular goal (e.g., votes, sales, donations, memberships).

You will need to make sure the project is new. You cannot work on old business except, perhaps, as background. Give us the name of a contact involved with the organization, campaign, or issue whom we can talk to, if we must, about what you propose.

In the first week, you will select your organization and envision a new initiative or program that you would like to see that organization develop (e.g., a new campaign for an advocacy group, a new community involvement plan for a company, etc.). Focus on launching something new rather than working with something that has already been done by the organization. Each week, you will create a rough draft as one part of your final writing e-portfolio and we will briefly discuss the material you created the following class period as well as any challenges you had in creating your draft. As part of the learning process, the professor will provide feedback on your drafts so that you can tailor your work accordingly.

**Lead Instructor**

**Personal**  
While I currently work and reside in Washington, D.C., my wife and I are originally from the Great State of Texas. We both went to Texas A&M University and were proudly born and raised back in Texas. Being from a state with lots and lots of land, I thoroughly enjoy being outside! My love of the outdoors is not limited to the wide expanses of Texas however, whether it is in
the nations’ Capitol, traveling the globe, watching college football, or entertaining my rowdy beagle – I’d rather be outside than behind a desk!

**Academic**
I am a proud graduate of Texas A&M University, doing so in 2005 with a B.B.A. in Management from the Mays Business School and again in 2006 with an M.A. in Advanced International Affairs from the George H. W. Bush School of Public Service. I am also a graduate of George Washington University’s Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM) with an MPS in Political Management.

**Professional**
I currently work on Capitol Hill, serving as a Legislative Assistant for a member of Congress from North Carolina. I handle all legislation for the Congresswoman regarding Healthcare, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Labor, Immigration, Transportation/FAA, Education, and Homeland Security. My first priority is briefing the Congresswoman on all relevant issues in my legislative jurisdiction, followed closely by countless meetings with constituents from the district she represents in order to ascertain their opinions on future legislation, and lastly to help draft and usher legislation through the committee process and to the floor of the House of Representatives. Notably, as our office represents a very diverse district, constituent input is vital and being able to change gears at a moment’s notice more often than not determines our level of success.

I also handle many aspects of our office’s communication and messaging strategy. In a Congressional office, messaging is everything, and crises are common. Part of my job requires speech writing, but much of it demands message and theme development.

Prior to my current office on Capitol Hill, I worked in the United States Senate for Senator John Cornyn (R-TX).

In the past, I have worked extensively in the healthcare field, spending time as an educator on the ever-changing healthcare industry and consulting small to medium sized business owners on how to best meet the needs of their employees concerning healthcare. While in Texas, I also worked on and managed several political campaigns, including races for Governor, U.S. Congressional Seats, Dallas County Judge, and the U.S. Senate. I have also worked internationally, with an international investment firm in London, England, and domestically for a State Senator in Boston, Massachusetts.

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**Phone:** +1.817.706.1371 (cell)
GW Writing Center

The GW Writing Center assists students with course writing assignments, research papers, theses, and personal statements. It is available to all undergraduate and graduate students: http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/.

The writing center is very practical and has many great resources, including online help.

If you would like to learn more about this help, please go to http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/help.html.

To access online help, you will need to download AIM: http://dashboard.aim.com/aim.

The writing center has links to other resources that you can access by going to http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/links.html.

For those who have English as their second language, you may visit: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/index.html.

Attendance, Academic Honesty Policy, and Accommodations

Attendance Policy
Attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss a discussion, it is your responsibility to notify the instructor. It is also the student's responsibility to review lecture notes and complete the readings as assigned. Regardless of the reason for missing a discussion, you will not be able to make up missed class participation points.

Academic Honesty Policy
The strength of the university and this program depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. Anyone breaching this policy is subject to expulsion from the master’s degree program.

End of Course Syllabus