

Teaching Grammar and Editing in Public Administration: Lessons Learned from Early Offerings of an Undergraduate Administrative Writing Course

Claire Connolly Knox

University of Central Florida School of Public Administration

ABSTRACT

College graduates need to possess strong writing skills before entering the workforce. Although many public administration undergraduate programs primarily focus on policy, finance, and management, we fall short of a larger goal if students cannot communicate results to a variety of audiences. This article discusses the results of a national survey, which concludes that few undergraduate public affairs programs require an administrative/technical writing course. Based on pedagogical theories, this article describes the design of a newly implemented, undergraduate, administrative writing course. The article concludes with lessons learned, provides recommendations for programs considering requiring an administrative writing course, and discusses future research.

Keywords: administrative writing, Plain Language Movement, discourse community, undergraduate course design

“Administrators not only need to know about communications, they need to be able to communicate” (Denhardt, 2001, p. 529). Public administration undergraduate students learn the importance of communication within organizations in leadership, human resources, or organizational management courses; however, practical instruction in communication skills, such as effective, audience-centered writing, are lacking. Scholars (e.g., Cleary, 1990, 1997; Lee, 2000; Raphael & Nesbary, 2005; Waugh & Manns, 1991) have noted this lack of required communication and writing courses in public administration curriculum. The majority of administrative writing literature is from the late 1980s and early 1990s when universities began implementing Writing Across the Curriculum programs (i.e.,

Londow, 1993; Stanford, 1992). The limited discussions and conclusions coincide with private and public sector trends—newly hired students' writing skills are lacking (Hines & Basso, 2008; National Commission, 2005).

A survey by the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2005) reported that approximately 80% of public sector human resource directors seriously considered writing skills when hiring professional employees and assumed new employees obtained these skills in college. Increasingly, public managers require employees to attend writing and communication trainings, which cost governments approximately \$221 million annually (National Commission, 2005). In fact, the public sector (66%) is more likely to send professional/salaried employees for writing training than the private sector (40%; National Commission, 2005). Public, private, and nonprofit sector organizations certainly should continue providing education in writing, and scholars (e.g., Coplin, 2003; Hines & Basso, 2008; Quible & Griffin, 2007) agree that newly graduated students should enter the workforce with a solid writing foundation.

For the past 30 years, statistics, policy, finance, and management remained the primary focus in many public administration undergraduate programs (Dougherty, 2011). Yet, we fall short of a larger goal if students cannot communicate program evaluation and policy analysis results to a variety of audiences. Researchers (i.e., Pincus, 1997; Raphael & Nesbary, 2005) have studied the lack of communication courses in Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Business Administration programs, but undergraduate public administration program design and content has received less attention (Dougherty, 2011). This article adds to the literature in two ways: by continuing the limited discussion of writing/communication skill development among public administration students at the undergraduate level and by offering an administrative writing course design that mixes pedagogical approaches.

Specifically, this article proposes that passage of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and high costs for writing skills training for new employees support the need for these undergraduate programs to add a technical/administrative writing course in the curricula. The recommendation aligns with the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration's (NASPAA) core competency accreditation requirement: "Development of communication abilities and skills—written, oral, and electronic" (1997, p. 6). This article briefly reviews the Plain Language Movement history and passage of the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The subsequent sections discuss survey results about writing requirements from NASPAA-accredited U.S. undergraduate public affairs programs, and grammar and writing pedagogical theories and best practices that informed and grounded the development of a newly designed administrative writing course. The conclusion provides pedagogically based recommendations for future changes to the writing course, and outlines future research.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PLAIN LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

In the early 1950s, the U. S. federal government slowly integrated the Plain Language Movement with the goal of well-written, concise, and audience-centered documents. Advocates for this new movement became more vocal after World War II and stressed that overly technical writing was an impediment to a citizen's understanding and participation in government goods and services (Law: Waging, 1978). Yet, it was not until after 1970 that the Plain Language Movement received federal and state government support through executive orders, memorandums, and legislation (Table 1). Two main reasons for this support are (a) the expanding size of the federal government, which consequently increased paperwork, and (b) an increasing national focus on consumer activism (Redish, 1985).

Table 1.

Brief History of the Plain Language Movement from Nixon to Obama Administrations

Presidential Administration	Year	Action
Nixon	1972	Formal request to use layperson's language in the Federal Register with sentences written clearly and in the active voice.
Carter	1978	Executive Orders 12044 and 12174 stated government regulations should be written clearly and without jargon.
Reagan	1981	Rescinded the executive orders in Section 10 of Executive Order 12291.
Clinton	1998	Presidential Memorandum for federal government documents to be written in layperson's terms.
Obama	2010	Plain Writing Act of 2010 created formal legislation requiring federal agencies to use an audience-centered approach and produce reader-friendly documents for the public.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 transitioned the Plain Language Movement from a voluntary to mandatory action. The act's purpose is to "improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use" (Plain Writing Act, 2010, § 4). Section 3.3 of the act defines plain writing as "writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience" (Plain Writing Act, 2010, § 7). Although this legislation provides no enforcement mechanism, agencies must designate a senior official as the Plain Writing liaison, explain new requirements to staff members and train them to comply with the new regulation, and design agency-specific implementation procedures and a plain language webpage whose web link is available on the homepage (Hasselkus, 2010).

Overall, passage and implementation of this legislation stresses the increasing need to educate future public administrators to write more concisely while remaining focused on the document's audience(s). The combination of public policy and workforce demands support the recommendation to require administrative or technical writing courses in undergraduate public administration curriculum.

UNIVERSITY APPROACHES

The challenge of improving undergraduate student writing skills is not unique to the public administration discipline; undergraduate programs across the United States struggle to incorporate writing assignments in their courses (Glenn, 2011). Some public administration, public affairs, and public policy programs have institutionalized solutions. The following section discusses results from a survey completed by NASPAA-accredited U.S. undergraduate public affairs program directors and coordinators.

Undergraduate Program Survey

A five-question e-mail survey was sent to academic coordinators in 72 undergraduate programs associated with member schools listed on NASPAA's website (National Association, n.d.; see Appendix A of this article). The survey asked the undergraduate program coordinators to provide information about any administrative or technical writing course offered within or outside their department. Following Dillman's (2007) approach, non-responsive programs received a reminder e-mail 1 week later and a phone call 3 weeks after the initial e-mail. Of the 72 programs, 53 responded, for a response rate of 74%.

Twelve undergraduate programs are no longer active, are suspended, or are listed incorrectly on the NASPAA website. Of the remaining 41 programs, 32% (13 out of 41) required an administrative and/or technical writing course in the program; two programs have a designated writing course in the department, while 11 programs recommend technical writing courses in the English, Communications, or Business departments (Table 2). Ten programs (24%) have modified existing core courses as writing-intensive courses (Table 3). Eighteen programs (44%) did not require an administrative and/or technical writing course. These results align with Raphael and Nesbary's (2005) study of communication courses in MPA programs. Should a public administration program offer an administrative writing course, or should the program refer students to technical writing courses in a Business, English, or Communications department? Concerns include evaluating the level of technical writing skills of public administration faculty and their ability to teach a writing course, as well as adopting a newly required writing course in an established program curriculum. Although 85% of responding programs require technical writing courses outside the program (primarily in the English department), there are benefits to creating a discipline-specific administrative writing course and potentially hiring an adjunct instructor with a technical writing background. Grammar is constructed; it depends on the discourse community that you belong

Table 2.

Required Writing Courses in Undergraduate Public Administration, Public Affairs, or Public Policy Programs

University	Writing Course in Public Administration Department	Writing Course in Other Department
Arizona State University		ENG 216: Persuasive Writing on Public Issues
Auburn University at Montgomery		ENG 3050: Advanced Expository Writing
California State University, Bakersfield		COMM 304: Technical and Report Writing
California State University, San Bernardino		MGMT 306: Expository Writing
Indiana University, Bloomington		ENG-W 231: Professional Writing Skills; BUS-X 204: Business Communications
Indiana University–Purdue University, Ft. Wayne		ENG W232: Introduction to Business Writing; ENG W233: Intermediate Expository Writing
Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis		ENG-W 231: Professional Writing Skills; BUS-X 204: Business Communications
University of Central Florida	PAD 3733: Administrative Writing in the Public Sector	
University of Maine	PAA 390: Technical Writing and Communication for Public Service	
University of Maine at Augusta		ENG 317w: Advanced Technical Communication
University of North Dakota		ENG 125: Technical and Business Writing
University of North Texas		TECM 2700: Technical Writing
University of San Francisco		INTD 307: Experience and Critical Writing; INTD 308: Advanced Expository Writing

to and what the community considers acceptable usage (Northedge, 2003). Each discipline and field has its own discourse community (i.e., engineering, law, journalism, medicine, government, etc.).

Although this type of course reviews different genres of professional writing (e.g., memos, reports, executive summaries, website evaluation), it also focuses on genres (e.g., grant proposals, press releases, federal rule evaluation) and characteristics unique to the public and nonprofit sector discourse community.

Table 3.

Writing Intensive Courses in Undergraduate Public Administration, Public Affairs, or Public Policy Programs

University	Writing Intensive Course in Public Administration Department	Writing Intensive Course in Other Department
College of William and Mary		Major Writing Requirement in an Economics course
Duke University	PUBPOL 114: Political Analysis for Public Policy Making	
Florida Atlantic University	PAD 4935: Senior Seminar (writing intensive); PAD 4933: Capstone Seminar in Public Management	
Georgia State University		PMAP 3311: Critical Policy Issues; PMAP 4051: Evaluating Public Policy
James Madison University	PPA 420: Public Management	
Michigan State University		Tier II Writing Course
Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg	PUBPL 304W: Public Policy Analysis	
Rutgers University–Newark	PAD 302: Global Urban Experience	
Stephen F. Austin State University	PBA 305: American Public Policy; PBA 405: Policy Analysis	
University of Albany, SUNY	RPUB 499: Senior Seminar	

Additionally, the course reinforces grammar, editing, and APA style rules and techniques, all of which aligns with best practices from the communications literature (e.g., Hines & Basso, 2008). The next section provides an overview of pedagogical theories that informed and grounded the development of the administrative writing course.

DESIGNING THE ADMINISTRATIVE WRITING COURSE

The School of Public Administration at a large university located in a southeastern, metropolitan city created a mandatory, undergraduate administrative writing course within the program curriculum. Faculty members, advisory board members, and local public sector leaders and employers identified writing deficiencies among current and former students: grammar (specifically incomplete sentences, run-on sentences, incorrect use of punctuation), wordiness, formatting and structure, plagiarism and improper use of APA style, and passive voice. To address many of

these writing deficiencies, the course design used a blended pedagogy with multiple grading mechanisms (i.e., exams, online modules, peer editing, group work, and individual writing assignments). The course also incorporated professional technical writers as guest speakers (e.g., the county's communication director, the city's public information officer, a local government website designer, and a federal grant writer/reviewer) who provided students with writing examples from their organizations.

Stanford (1992) provides some best writing practices for MPA programs: incorporating many short writing assignments instead of one lengthy research paper; writing for multiple audiences; setting clear writing goals and competencies for students in the course; evaluating students' writing and providing feedback; and handling students' writing workload, which can overwhelm writing instructors. The next sections discuss these best practices, as well as some pedagogical theories for grammar and writing, in more detail as they relate to the undergraduate administrative writing course design.

Grammar Review

Although not discussed by Stanford (1992), the course began with a brief grammar review. Hines and Basso's case study stresses the need for grammar review in communication/writing courses: "At the heart of all written communication remains the proper use of the rules of English Grammar. . . . Incoherent sentences and ambiguous thoughts doom writing to fail at its most fundamental and important level, communicating ideas" (2008, pp. 294, 297). The grammar review incorporated a mix of the rules-based and content-based approaches. The rules-based approach to teaching grammar (also known as deductive approach and traditional school grammar approach) is a teacher-centered approach focusing on grammar definitions and rules, and then requiring students to apply those rules to specific isolated exercises (Weaver, 1996). Examples of this approach include diagramming sentences and memorizing definitions (e.g., predicates, fragments, subordinate clauses).

The content-based, or inductive, approach gained popularity in the 1960s and applies grammar definitions and rules to students' writing (Quible & Griffin, 2007). Through this student-centered approach, students discover grammar rules, concepts, and exceptions while writing or editing their assignments. Weaver (1996) advocated for the content-based approach for teaching grammar and cited many studies (i.e., Calkins, 1980; DiStefano & Killion, 1984; Harris & Rowan, 1989; Noguchi, 1991) conducted on elementary through college-aged students. Specifically applicable to the design of the administrative writing course is Harris and Rowan's (1989) study of undergraduate students' understanding of grammar concepts. The authors concluded that students needed the application of grammar concepts in their writing, in addition to knowing grammar rules and definitions. Specifically, students in the study could define a sentence, but failed to differentiate between a fragment or run-on sentence and a grammatically correct sentence (Weaver, 1996).

Scholars (i.e., Hartwell, 1985; Kolln & Gray, 2009) note that teaching grammar out of context largely has no impact on improving students' writing.

Although the debate between rules-based and content-based approaches to teaching grammar continues (Quible & Griffin, 2007), this article recommends a combination of the two approaches, especially when there is a mix of students from different generations and with varied learning styles. The course design included the combined approaches because feedback on student deficiencies from faculty indicated the need for a grammar rules review before applying the rules to writing. For the first 2 weeks of the course, I created grammar and editing assignments based on the rules-based approach (e.g., separate grammar exercise worksheets on specific rules), which provided the needed foundation for future writing assignments. Students requesting additional instruction in grammar rules received sources for self-study.¹

After the grammar review, the class reviews the American Psychological Association's (APA) writing and formatting style. This style is required in every public administration core course in our school, yet few students had received formal training. The students were mostly familiar with the Modern Language Association writing style, which the Liberal Arts commonly use in English courses. I reviewed common differences between the two styles and taught APA style in more detail, and then required students to complete an interactive APA online module offered through the university's library Obojobo system.² The module is easily incorporated into any course with the website link provided in the syllabus, and the system grades the concluding quiz. As discussed later in this article, including a university's library or writing center online grammar, writing, or editing module helps overcome the large amount of time required to evaluate students' writing and use of grammar. Then the course focus shifted for the remainder of the semester to a content-based approach where students apply grammar rules and concepts in their writing assignments.

Multiple Short Writing Assignments

In most public administration courses, writing assignments consist of long research papers. Although this skill is useful to develop if a student is interested in attending graduate school, it is not as useful in the practitioner world (Stanford, 1992). Professional writing consists of brief writing, such as memos, letters, reports, executive summaries, and press releases. When students are being introduced to a new discourse community, Northedge (2003) recommends small, frequent writing assignments that allow students to "position themselves within the discourse" (p. 178). Zeiser (1999) recommends modifying current course writing assignments from research papers to shorter writing assignments, thus allowing students to receive more feedback from the instructor on their writing and formatting.³ Another option is to add small writing elements to a research paper, such as an executive summary, press/news release, twitter feeds, or business letter. These

smaller assignments can be completed before writing the research paper and provide students additional opportunities for grammar, formatting, editing, and content feedback.

All assignments in the administrative writing course are examples of writing genres realistic to the public and nonprofit sector. I designed individual and group assignments to mimic the work environment I experienced as a technical writer for 11 years in the federal and local government and the private and nonprofit sectors. Students were encouraged to use a variety of media to complete and submit their assignments, including hard copy and electronic collaborative learning tools (i.e., Google Docs, discussion threads). The eight genres of government and nonprofit writing covered include Rules, Regulations, and Administrative Procedures; Executive Summaries and Abstracts; Policy Handbooks and Guides; Memorandums; Press Releases; Professional Report Writing; Grant Proposal Writing; and Government/ Nonprofit Websites.

Most of the assignments were modified from the course textbook, *Writing for the Government* (Allison & Williams, 2008), and students could customize the topic of the assignment (e.g., the final assignment could evaluate a nonprofit organization website). (See Appendix B). As discussed further in the conclusion, future modifications to assignments should include more peer editing and require students to provide recommendations when reviewing government documents and websites.

Writing for Multiple Audiences

Audience-centered writing is a common pedagogy in technical writing courses and an important one to incorporate in an administrative writing course. Public administrators frequently write for multiple audiences, including internal (i.e., employees, volunteers, supervisor/managers, board members) and external stakeholders (i.e., public, interest groups, community partners, elected officials) in various programs (Lee, 2000; Raphael & Nesbary, 2005). These audiences have different needs and levels of understanding. For the writing assignments, I require students to consider and include the intended audience at the top of the document. For about half of the assignments, I give the document back to the student without reviewing it and ask them to rewrite the document for a different audience. Then students submit both documents—same topic but different audiences—for grading. For example, a memo about a potential public health threat for children will contain varying levels of detailed information when written for parents versus principals of local schools.

Writing Goals and Competencies

As with any course, clear learning objectives should be included in the syllabus and reviewed with students at the beginning of the semester. Some learning goals for the administrative writing course have been discussed (i.e., analyze writing samples for grammar and formatting using editing notations; apply the principles

of understanding an audience and modify the document to better fit the intended audience).

As potential managers, students need to learn editing techniques in addition to having a good grammar foundation. Therefore, training students to become better editors is a goal of this course and ties into the recognized deficiencies. Students spend time learning to reduce redundancy, wordiness, and use of clichés and slang. Nearly every writing assignment incorporates editing techniques requiring the student to submit more than one copy of the assignment. I created an APA style editing checklist for the course, which is posted on the school's website for all public administration students to access (see Appendix C). Instructors could require students to use this checklist, or something similar, when completing writing assignments to encourage incorporating the editing and polishing stage of the writing process.

Evaluating Student Writing

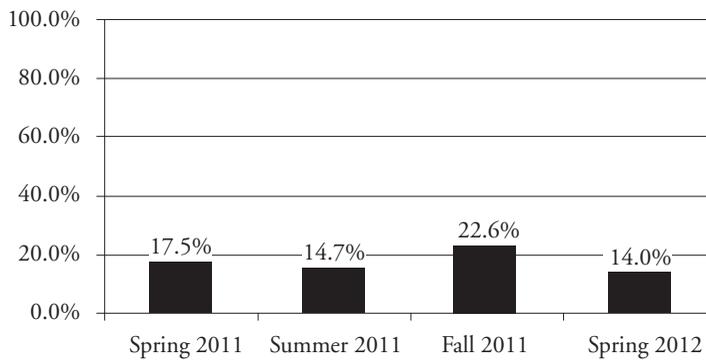
A common complaint about incorporating additional writing assignments is the amount of time it takes for instructors to provide individual feedback. Although a writing course requires more time commitment for the instructor, the literature recommends a number of options to decrease the time commitment (e.g., peer editing, freewriting, online modules, short assignments, group work; Stanford, 1992). As discussed previously in this article, the administrative writing course incorporated some of these options throughout the semester.

Studies of student peer-editing and peer-reviewing exercises have concluded with increased results in student writing and editing skills (Cho & Cho, 2011; Diab, 2010). I incorporated peer editing not only to reinforce editing, grammar, and APA formatting skills but also to reduce the amount of my editing time. Students distributed copies of their writing assignment to two classmates and used the APA-specific editing checklist I created as a guide in the peer-editing process. I recommend students peer edit at least two other papers and include the edited drafts with the final paper. Additionally, students worked in groups on some assignments (i.e., basic grammar, memo, and report assignments); this activity not only lightened my grading load but also mimicked a real-world task.

Pre- and Post-Test Results

Results from pre- and post-tests over the first four semesters of the course show an increase of between 14 and 22.6 percentage points in students' application of grammatical and formatting rules (Table 1). The pre- and post-tests measured students' learning with the rules-based approach and included nine grammar questions and 11 APA formatting questions. Grammar questions focused on fragments, comma splices, fused sentences, subject-verb agreement, and pronoun agreement. The APA style and formatting included test questions on quotations and quotation marks, in-text citations, capitalization, and punctuation.

Figure 1.
Pre- and Post-Test Percentage Increase Results



Although the students' post-test scores show a measurable increase, there is room for improvement (Figure 1). One way to increase students' grammar and formatting knowledge is modifying the course design. I taught the rules-based grammar approach during the first 2 weeks of the course; the remaining weeks implemented the content-based approach. Students complete the post-test during the final exam review in the second-to-last week of the semester. A lesson learned is not separating the two approaches, but integrating them throughout the entire semester. A potential solution is to add mini lessons once a week to review commonly missed grammar and formatting rules in that week's assignment (Weaver, 1996). The first 10 to 15 minutes of class could be set aside for this task and include questions from students. The following section includes additional recommendations based on pedagogical literature and future research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public administration graduates need to possess well-written, concise, and audience-centered writing skills as well as understand government and the non-profit sector's discourse community. Implementation of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and the increasing costs of writing training for new employees provide an opportunity to reevaluate the writing and communication skills of public administration students as well as the writing requirements for these undergraduate programs. This article recommends that undergraduate public administration programs require a technical/administrative writing course in the core curriculum, whether taught in-house or in another department. This article also discusses the design of a discipline-specific administrative writing course and related pedagogical theories. The course design included two approaches to teaching grammar and writing; however, other approaches are available, including sentence-combining

approach and process approach. Improving the course design and assignments could increase students' knowledge and application of grammar, formatting, and writing skills.

The literature discusses other types of writing exercises (i.e., freewriting, zero draft, journals) that an administrative writing course could incorporate. Freewriting can be a non-graded writing assignment allowing students the opportunity to overcome writer's block or practice a new grammatical concept, such as using semicolons to combine short, related sentences. Freewriting exercises are less stressful, can last 10 to 15 minutes, and are for the student (Stanford, 1992).

Although the administrative writing course did not incorporate a writing portfolio until the second year, students should create a portfolio and self-reflect on how their writing style and ability change over the semester. As Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) explain, portfolios allow students to take ownership of their learning experience. Writing assignments and feedback from peers and the instructor are included in the final portfolio. Based on this material, students reflect and self-assess their progress, specifically their growth as a writer. This includes listing writing strengths and weaknesses for them to continue working on after the course ends. Completing a writing portfolio with self-reflection at the end of the semester allows the instruction and assessment to blend (Paulson et al., 1991).

Limitations and Future Research

This article had some limitations; namely, the pre- and post-test results reported on the students' knowledge of grammar and formatting rules (rules-based approach) and not on the increase in general writing skills (content-based approach). Although the course implemented both pedagogical approaches, future research should measure the effectiveness of students' use of peer editing and portfolio techniques on their writing skills. This article focused on the creation and initial implementation of an undergraduate public administration writing course, but future research should include intermediate and long-term outcome measures to test changes in students' writing skills under the rules-based and content-based approaches.

Another limitation was that the brief survey to the program directors did not allow them to elaborate on the learning objectives in the administrative or technical writing course. Future research could study the commonalities and differences in learning objectives and class structure of administrative writing courses implemented in public administration programs. On a related note, a broader research question based on the survey results in this article should delve into the effects of an administrative writing course taught within a public administration program versus in a Business, English, or Communications department.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Grammar and writing resources include Barzun's *Simple & Direct: A Rhetoric for Writers* (2001), Bernstein's *Watch Your Language* (1976), William and Colomb's *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (2010), Sabin's *The Gregg Reference Manual: A Manual of Style, Grammar, Usage, and Formatting* (2005), Strunk's *Elements of Style* (2012), and Simmons' Grammar Bytes website: <http://www.chompchomp.com/menu.htm>
- 2 Obojobo is an interactive online learning system created by the University of Central Florida. For additional information about this system, see <https://obojobo.ucf.edu/>
- 3 For additional information on short assignments and providing student feedback, see Bean (2011).

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Claire Connolly Knox is an assistant professor and coordinator of the Emergency Management and Homeland Security Program in the University of Central Florida's School of Public Administration. Her research interests include environmental policy and management, critical theory, and environmental vulnerability and disaster response. She has published in the *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, and *Journal of Emergency Management*.

APPENDIX A

E-mail Survey to Public Administration, Public Affairs, and Public Policy Programs

You are receiving this short email survey because NASPAA lists your undergraduate public administration program on its website. I am conducting research and writing an article about the status of writing course requirements for undergraduate public administration programs in the U.S. Although I was able to answer some questions using your department's website, I would like to confirm this information with your input. If you could answer the following five questions at your earliest convenience, I would greatly appreciate it.

Question 1: Does your undergraduate public administration program require an administrative and/or technical writing course that is separate from any required lower division general English course? (If yes, please continue to question 2. If no, please stop here and email your survey response back to me. Thank you for your time.)

Question 2: Is this administrative and/or technical writing course listed as a core requirement or as an elective in your program?

Question 3: Is this course taught in the Public Administration Department? (If yes, continue to question 4; If no, continue to question 5).

Question 4: What is the name and number of the course offered in your department? For example, PAD 3XXX—Administrative Writing

Question 5: What is the name and number of the course offered in a different department? For example, ENG 4XXX—Technical Writing or BUS 4XXX—Business Writing

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

APPENDIX B

Administrative Writing Course Assignments

Two Grammar Exercise Assignments—Students will complete grammar worksheets based on material covered in the grammar handout individually and in class with other students.

Editing Assignment—This individual exercise will test the student’s ability to simplify wordy phrases and sentences.

Citing with APA and Avoiding Plagiarism Library Module—Students will complete the library’s Citing with APA and Avoiding Plagiarism modules in the Obojobo system and complete the assessment quiz individually. If you completed this module for a previous class, you cannot import your grade for this assignment.

Library Assignment—The librarian will distribute a worksheet that will test your ability to search and locate books, journals, and journal articles on the library’s online database systems.

Grant Assignment—The website link to the Corporation for National and Community Service grant application is www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/10_0430_ncbp_nofa_final.pdf Using the proposal guidelines, create a detailed outline to help you write a competitive grant proposal. Complete the following tasks:

- a. Search the proposal guidelines for mention of particular sections that the proposal reviewers would expect to see. These sections will serve as section headers in your proposal.
- b. After you have identified the sections, arrange the sections in your proposal outline in the same order that they appear in the proposal guidelines.
- c. Under each section, brainstorm or list the data or evidence that you believe proposal reviewers will find persuasive. For example, under the “program design” section, jot down a list of important facts about your organization or project that would give the proposal audience the background information that they would need.
- d. Make a list of forms or attachments that you are required to include in the proposal.
- e. If available, consult proposal writing resources listed on the funding agency’s website for help with unfamiliar terminology in the proposal guidelines or on forms (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 151).

In Class: Memo Assignment—“In groups of three or four, use the Toulmin model to write a one-to-two-page, double-spaced policy memorandum that argues for at least one major change to your course syllabus” (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 105). You will submit two items: a diagrammed model of your argument and a policy memorandum.

Rules Assignment: Part 1—“Go to www.regulations.gov and find a proposed rule that allows you to submit a public comment to a proposed rule online [the public comment period needs to be open through the end of the semester]. Select a proposed rule that you have some stake in and would therefore be considered a stakeholder” (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 57). Print out the first page of the proposed rule and highlight the end date of the public comment period (worth one of the five points for this assignment). **Part 2**—First, in two to three sentences explain who is the audience and potential stakeholder for the rule. Second, respond to the proposed rule with a 150 to 200 word (maximum) public comment and consider the following questions: “Do you agree with the rule? Is it clear? Your comment can be complimentary or critical, but it must be professional and well written. Your comment can also be in response to the content of the rule and/or the way the rule is written” (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 57). Before submitting your assignment, we will discuss all comments in class. You are not required to submit your comment on www.regulations.gov, but it is a great opportunity to participate in the democratic process.

Press Release Assignment—Students will write a one-page press release for a real or fake event or announcement. If you volunteer with an organization, this is a great opportunity to create a press release for an upcoming event. Grading will focus on proper press release formatting, correct use of the inverted pyramid, and grammar structure.

In Class: Report Writing—Experts are the intended audience for Figure 6.8 CDC Influenza Weekly Report, which includes “language and statistics that most non-expert audiences would not understand. In a group, identify a non-expert audience (elementary school teachers, school principals, day care workers, etc.)” who would find the report useful (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 128). Then, rewrite the CDC report as a one-page, single-spaced document to your identified non-expert audience, while considering the following questions:

- a. What information is important to this audience?
- b. What type of evidence (statistics, stories, examples) might this audience need to understand the report?
- c. Is the tone and word choice in the original report appropriate for the new audience?
- d. What information needs to be deleted or left out of the report?
- e. What information needs to be added for this audience?
- f. What constraints might make rewriting this report for a new audience difficult? (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 128).

Website Evaluation Assignment—Go online and review government or non-profit websites. Then choose one website to evaluate for this assignment. You will apply the principles of audience-centered writing and evaluate the cultural context, and will complete the assignment in an essay format (third person) with the following five sections:

- a. Introduction:
 - What website did you choose?
 - Why did you choose this website?
 - What is your purpose statement for this assignment?
- b. Audience:
 - Who do you think the primary audience is for the site?
 - Who might be the stakeholders for the site or an issue on the site?
 - What might be some of the demographic characteristics of the audience members?
 - How inviting is the site for its audience or audiences? Specifically, what features make you think it is inviting or not?
 - Does it seem to cater to certain people and not others? How so?
 - Does the site contain language specific to a particular group or audience (such as acronyms)? If it does, provide some examples.
 - What ethos does the site portray of the agency or organization? (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 198).
- c. Purpose:
 - What purpose or purposes are there for the site or some of its webpages?
 - How useful is it in finding information?
 - What features make it useful? Which do not?
 - Does the site contain features for a type of website genre? What are those features, and do you think users would recognize them and be able to use them naturally without hesitating to think about them?
 - In the terminology of website development, how “intuitive” are they for the user? (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 198).
- d. Cultural Context:
 - What kinds of economic, historical, political, social, ethical, and/or technological aspects do you believe contribute to the usefulness of the site (or it not being useful)? For instance, is the site accessible for the disabled? Does it have features for non-native English speakers? What kinds of technological features does it offer? Do those help communicate its messages or get in their way? How so?
 - If you can tell, how might the site have changed over time? What do you attribute to that change?
 - What features on the site stimulate input from the public or stakeholders?
 - If it is a federal government site, does the site include the various recommendations listed on the ICGI checklist in Figure 8.28? (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 198).
- e. Conclusion:
 - Restate your purpose statement and summarize your review of this website.

APPENDIX C

Editing Techniques and Advice

This handout is a short checklist of common grammatical and formatting errors made by undergraduate and graduate students. All of the page numbers reference *APA Style Guide* 6th Edition. Although this handout provides APA-specific guidelines for editing your document, always follow any specific requirements set forth by your professor.

Check Formatting

- A correctly formatted cover page (p. 23).
- Heading and page numbers are required at the top of each page, including the cover page.
- All margins are 1 inch. Word 2007 and 2010 default to 1.25 inches.
- Do not include extra spacing between paragraphs. This is another common default in Word.
- Use a font size of 12 and Times New Roman style throughout the entire document.
- Avoid one-sentence paragraphs.
- Avoid one-page paragraphs (each paragraph should be four to five sentences long).
- Include section headings to guide your reader through your document (pp. 62–63).
- Do not orphan headings or sentences at the bottom of a page.
- Everything in the document is double spaced, including the references.
- References start on a separate page and sources are listed alphabetically (Ch. 7).

Check for Plagiarism (Ch. 6)

- Paraphrasing
 - Include in-text citations for all paraphrased material (Table 6.1 on p. 177). For example, (Brown, 2010).
 - Include these sources in the reference list. All sources cited in your document have to be in your reference list.
- Direct Quote
 - In-text citation with page or paragraph number, as well as quotation marks, is required for all direct quotes. For example, (Brown, 2010, p. 45).
 - If your direct quote is more than 40 words, then make it into a block quote (p. 171).
 - Include this source in the reference list.

Check for Sentence Structure

- Avoid writing in the first person (e.g., I, me, us, you, we). Write in third person.
- Avoid starting a sentence with a conjunction (e.g., and, or, but), number, acronym, or “because” in professional writing.
- Avoid using contractions (e.g., can’t, don’t, won’t, shouldn’t) in professional writing.
- Use action verbs, check for subject-verb agreement, and use the correct verb tense (pp. 77–79).
- Avoid slang or clichés (e.g., benefit of the doubt, dime a dozen, fell on deaf ears).
- Write concisely by removing duplicating words and/or phrases (e.g., small *in size*, brief *in duration*, *a total of* 152 participants) (p. 67).
- Use concrete words instead of abstractions (i.e., an “animal” could be a cat, dog, bear, tiger, or horse).
- Clarify all pronouns by including the antecedent near the referencing pronoun. Avoid starting a sentence with “this,” “that,” “it,” “these,” or “those” without including the antecedent (pp. 79–80).
- Use correct punctuation (Ch. 4).
- Spell out an acronym the first time you use it in a document and then place the acronym in parentheses, such as Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (p. 107).
- Fix all run-on sentences in one of these ways:
 - create two separate sentences,
 - link two independent clauses (clauses that are complete sentences) with a semicolon,
 - combine independent clauses with a comma and coordinating conjunction (e.g., and, but, or, nor, yet, so, for), or
 - subordinate one of the independent clauses by using a subordinating conjunction (e.g., before, unless, whenever, while, whether).

Last but not least...

- Read your paper backwards. This old journalism trick works well. Many times we memorize our document by repeatedly reading it from start to finish. By reading the last sentence, and then the sentence before the last sentence, each sentence stands out. This method allows you to read this document like it is the first time.
- Always have someone else read over your paper. They do not need to be a subject-matter expert, but another person can catch the missing verb in a sentence or an unclear pronoun.
- After printing the final paper, review it again. Sometimes headings get orphaned and/or margins get reset that can affect the final format of the document.

Website and Book References

Here are selected websites available to students learning and applying APA citation and formatting guidelines:

- APA website: <http://apastyle.org/>
- OWL website: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- Additionally, here are selected references and websites to use for grammar review:
- Sabin, W. A. (2005). *The Gregg Reference Manual: A Manual of Style, Grammar, Usage, and Formatting* (11th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Grammar Review Website:
<http://www.newsroom101.com/NR2/grammar/>