



# ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

## St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of English

English 378 / Math Elective 300: Professional Communications in Statistics and Actuarial Science (041/042), **Winter 2021** (online)

Instructor: Mark Spielmacher [msspielm@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:msspielm@uwaterloo.ca)

Office: Sweeney Hall 2207 (inaccessible until COVID-19 restrictions are lifted)

Office Hours: we will need to stay in touch by e-mail or by on-line video appointments.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION and OBJECTIVES**

Effective communication and collaboration – skills learned through application and practice – are essential for success in most disciplines, particularly in actuarial science and statistics, fields in which complex information will need to be delivered clearly and occasionally explained to range of audiences from specialists to non-experts. This course primarily involves theory, investigation, practice, and feedback: your writing abilities will be assessed to give you individual direction with respect to what needs to be worked on; you will examine documents written by professionals and explore the needs of people in the discipline; you will consider various audiences (such as colleagues, clients, executives, and the “general public”) in different situations and the use of accessible language and technical concepts where appropriate, along with strategies to reinforce understanding; you will practice editing and revising your work. In order to best meet your own learning needs, you will be offered a range of assignments from which to choose. You may also work collaboratively on some assignments. Because we will not be meeting in person, I will be delivering the information via PowerPoint presentations and short videos.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS [AND OTHER REQUIRED/SUGGESTED READINGS]**

No textbooks are required. I recommend linking to [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab](#) (OWL).

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

Participation and peer editing	Throughout the term	10%
Short bi-weekly assignments (choice)	Throughout the term	40%
Critical Analysis	Feb. 4 and 11	10%
Non-specialist assignment (blog or video)	March 4 and 11	15%
Short report proposal and literature review	April 1	5%
Executive short report	April 15 and 20	15%
Reflection assignment	April 20	5%

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

More detailed guidelines will be provided for the assignments.

**Participation and peer editing (10%).** Every week for the first several weeks, I will ask you to post your thoughts in a discussion forum on Learn as an alternative to classroom discussion. My goal is to get you communicating among yourselves; I may contribute my thoughts from time to time, but my role will mostly be to observe. You will also earn your grade by having assignment drafts ready for peer editing and by providing sincere, constructive peer feedback on your classmate's drafts.

**Short bi-weekly assignments (40%).** In this case, "bi-weekly" means occurring roughly every two weeks. These short assignments will be worth 10% each, and you will have an opportunity to choose from six in total. You may re-write one assignment to improve your grade.

**Critical analysis (10%).** You will be given a choice of assignments; these will normally involve reading for salient details; practicing criticism, statistical analysis, or critical comparison; or demonstrating statistical literacy – showing that you understand the requirements of "specialist" communication in your field. This assignment will be done in two drafts and will be peer edited.

**Non-specialist assignment: blog or video (15%).** The audience for this assignment is the "general" public, such as clients, young people considering career paths, people who want understand some of the implications of what you do, or anyone looking to be informed or inspired about what the future might bring. What this audience has in common is little to no background in your field of study, so you will need to apply strategies discussed in class for explaining the technical content. If you choose to do a blog, you will be encouraged to create an actual online blog (using a free hosting site) that incorporates multimodal elements. If you choose to do a video, you will need to find a partner (such as a classmate or friend or family member) to act as your non-specialist audience. The ten-minute video will demonstrate your ability to employ various strategies to explain a technical concept in a way that your audience can understand, and will also demonstrate engagement with the audience. This assignment will be peer edited or reviewed.

**Proposal, literature review, and executive short report (20%).** Often executives, policy-makers, and other important folks will rely on you to read the technical literature in order to explain the content and the repercussions of changes in the field and to make recommendations. This project will be done in stages. First, you will write a brief proposal (5%) explaining your audience, purpose, and proposed sources of information (research/literature review). You will also share your proposal with a few classmates for feedback. Finally, you will produce a brief report (15%) that summarizes and incorporates the research findings in order to make specific recommendations to your target audience. The language you use in the report will be less technical: semi-specialist readers have their own areas of expertise and will not always share your understanding of concepts and specific training. This final assignment will be done in two drafts.

**Reflection Assignment (5%).** With reference to guiding questions, you will write honestly and critically about your experiences in the course: what you learned or at least considered while looking at course materials and completing assignments.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week beginning	Topics	Assignment due
Jan. 11	Course introduction and ways of thinking about communication	Remember to respond to the weekly guiding questions. Bi-weekly writing assignments will also be assigned; due dates for these will be flexible.
Jan. 18	Common grammatical issues Concise writing	
Jan. 25	Specialist communication	Critical analysis assigned
Feb. 1	Organization, clarity, document usability	<b>Peer editing of critical analysis drafts (Feb 4)</b>
Feb. 8	Non-specialist communication, multimodality, strategies for explaining difficult concepts	<b>Due date for critical analysis (Feb 11)</b>
Feb. 22	Workplace communications Collaborative work	Non-specialist blog or video assigned
March 1	Presentation skills	<b>Peer editing or review of blog or video assignment (March 4)</b>
March 8	Semi-specialist communication	<b>Blog/Video assignment due (March 11)</b>
March 22	Research skills and documentation of sources, writing proposals	
March 29	Report writing	<b>Proposal/research review due (April 1)</b>
April 5	Reflection writing	
April 12	Concluding remarks	<b>Peer editing of report drafts (April 15)</b>
		<b>Final report and reflection due April 20</b>

### **POLICY ON LATE WORK, MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, AND MAKE-UP TESTS**

Because of the situation we find ourselves in, I plan to be flexible with due dates. However, if you find that you will be unable to submit work by the Sunday following the week an assignment is due, I would appreciate being informed. With respect to drafts, it is very important to do your best to have something ready for peer editing to avoid getting too far behind. Any other issues will be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is your responsibility to make sure that all work is completed; although I *may* send one reminder e-mail if I notice something has not been submitted, I will not generally send repeat reminders.

## **RULES FOR GROUP WORK IN ASSIGNMENTS**

If you choose to work collaboratively on the video and/or report assignment, please let me know of your intentions, and I will ask both collaborators to sign a Group Assignment Checklist:

[https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/sites/ca.arts/files/uploads/files/group\\_assignment\\_disclosure.pdf](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/sites/ca.arts/files/uploads/files/group_assignment_disclosure.pdf)

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

Students using e-mail to contact me must include their first and last names, student number, and course section in which they are enrolled in the e-mail subject line. E-mails composed in this course must be formally and professionally written.

## **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**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/](http://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/](http://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-SJUSCapproved.pdf](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](http://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](http://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](http://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/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/).