



School of Public Policy and Administration

AP/PPAS 2195 3.0 Professional Skills and Communications: Course Outline

Date: **IN-PERSON LECTURES - Mondays 11:30am-12:30pm in ACW 205**+ tutorials (see below)

Course Director: Dr. Peter P. Constantinou

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Tutorial Leader: Jennifer Servos Jones Email: jservos@yorku.ca

IN-PERSON TUTORIALS

| Tutorial Section | Monday - Time | Location |
|------------------|----------------|----------|
| 1. | 12:30pm-2:30pm | SC 205 |
| 2. | 2:30pm-4:30pm | SC 205 |
| 3. | 4:30pm-6:30pm | SC 205 |

Teaching Team

Dr. Peter Constantinou is one of Canada's leading practitioner-academics and an award-winning university lecturer. Dr. Constantinou has spent more than a decade as a civil servant at the federal and provincial levels of government, as Chief of Staff to the Ontario Minister of Education and Training, as a lobbyist in the college/university sector, and as an academic. He has been teaching in the School of Public Policy and Administration at York University for over 30 years. He regularly provides advice and training to governments around the world and has completed over 480 projects with governments in China and is currently providing advice and training to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank in Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria and Peru. Dr. Constantinou is currently Academic Director of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme (OLIP). He holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Toronto, a MA and BA in Public Policy and Administration from McMaster University and York University respectively. He was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal in 2025 for excellence in public sector education.

Tutorial Leader:

Jennifer Servos Jones is a former civil servant with over 15 years of experience in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) across three different ministries. She began her career in the public service as a summer student while completing her bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Toronto. After several years of experience in the OPS in research and data analyst roles, she completed the Master of Public Policy, Administration, and Law (MPPAL) program at York University. In recent years she served in various advisory roles to senior executives in the Ontario Ministries of Education, Environment, and Solicitor General with a focus on communications, and strategic and operational policy. She is currently completing her PhD in the Faculty of Education at York University, researching post-secondary education policy in Ontario.

Land Acknowledgment

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region ([LA&PS Land Acknowledgement](#)).

Course Description

Professional and communications skills have never been more important than now. In this course you will learn key professional, and communications skills related to employment and leadership in general, with a particular emphasis on the government and broader public sector. The course will help to facilitate your understanding of the workplace and to best position you for success. These skills are taught in 3 ways:

1. Readings and lectures focusing on current research and best practices;
2. Role play, workshops and simulation exercises;
3. Self-awareness inventories.

Course Goals

The purpose of this course is to expose students to and make them aware of best practices and expectations of relevant workplaces to ensure they are prepared for practicums, co-ops, internships and employment in the public sector, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector. The course is intended to get you thinking about:

- Intrapersonal skills (Self-awareness and capacity building/development);
- Interpersonal skills;
- Leadership skills;
- Business/professional skills.

Expected Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, students should be able to have:

- A clear understanding of workplace expectations and ethics;
- Competence in preparation of a variety of common written documents (emails, correspondence, briefing materials and reports, including proper citation);
- Competence in preparation of presentation decks and delivery of presentations;
- Development of skills related to interviewing, teamwork, leadership, networking and other “soft skills”.

eClass and Zoom

eClass is the learning platform used by York University to allow us to have a personalized learning platform/environment for our course. The free site allows us to access all the materials, such as slide decks, assignments and videos, as well as a secure site for us to upload student work for assessment.

While the class is intended to be delivered in-person, unique circumstances may require the use of Zoom. Zoom is a free video conferencing software app that allows us to engage virtually for video, presentations, group work and chat rooms. More detail about these systems will be shared at the beginning of the course. Students shall note the following:

- Zoom is hosted on servers in the U.S. This includes recordings done through Zoom;
- If you have privacy concerns about your data, provide only your first name or a nickname when you join a session;
- The system is configured in a way that all participants are automatically notified when a session is being recorded. In other words, a session cannot be recorded without you knowing about it.

Teaching Methodology

Classes will comprise various formats including lecture, class discussion, role play and workshop. Lectures will provide the context for the readings, which should be completed before the date listed. Discussions will build on the readings and lecture material and all students are expected to actively participate. In a number of instances, workshops, simulations and role play will be conducted where students will be charged with working together in groups to produce results/answers to questions/challenges presented in class. These workshops will focus on how to conduct/prepare various analyses and government documents.

Students are strongly encouraged to prepare for class by completing the readings, participate in the discussion and take an active role in the various pedagogical methods used in the tutorials.

Class Participation and Professionalism

For an active class discussion attendance is a must, but passive attendance will not be assessed positively in either the lecture or tutorial. In order to be able to participate in class discussion, it is important that you do the readings in advance of each class. Participation will be evaluated on the basis of the expectations and associated point values indicated in the following table:

| Student Activity/Expectation | Point Value |
|--|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sporadic attendance/not punctual▪ Passive attendance most of the time | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Good attendance/punctual▪ Awake/attentive most of the time | 2 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Above, plus:▪ Regularly participates – demonstrating a contribution to the discussion▪ Does not necessarily demonstrate a preparedness or command of the reading▪ Perhaps a cursory understanding of the topic | 3 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Above, plus:▪ Regularly and clearly prepared by reading the material▪ Actively seeking to be engaged in the discussion▪ Does not over participate or dominate the conversation▪ Respectful of other opinions▪ Does not participate just for the sake of participating, but to make a contribution to the collective understanding of the issue/topic▪ Peers do not raise complaints/concerns of lack of engagement in group work | 4 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Above, plus:▪ Fully engaged at a superior level▪ Not only demonstrated a command of the material, but brings reflections/thoughts to the conversation▪ Takes a leadership role in the presentation of ideas▪ Contribution is thoughtful, does not take the classroom discussion off track▪ Brings questions to class that are provocative▪ Successfully brings in personal/work experiences that enhance/enrich the discussion | 5 |

When engaging in class discussion think about the following factors and how they relate to and might enhance your contribution:

- Relevance: are your comments clearly related to the case and to the comments of others?
- Advancement: Do your comments move the class discussion forward or simply reiterate points that have already been made?
- Support: Have you used specific data from the case, from the readings, or from your personal experiences to back up the assertions that you are making?

- Clarity: Are your comments succinct and understandable?
- Quantity: Do you participate on a regular basis?

The above attempts to highlight two important parts of a good discussion: preparation (so that you can support your answers and make clear statements) and listening (so that you respond to the discussion as it unfolds). Please treat others as respected colleagues. This course works to develop your employability skills. As a result, professionalism will be graded on the assessment of your approach to your studies, to the assignments in and outside of class, your treatment of others and the seriousness with which you approach the requirements of the course including attention to detail. Students will understand that each of us makes an impression on others and the quality of that impression can be an important determinant of success – a variety of exercises will be undertaken to develop those ideals, and to influence those impressions.

Textbook and Required Course Materials

The following texts are required reading for the course:

1. Aamodt, M. G. and Raynes B. (2001). Human Relations in Business: Developing Interpersonal and Leadership Skills (1st Ed.) Publisher: Wadsworth/Thomson ISBN 0534355080 (Available as course kit in the bookstore only). Approx. \$65.00
2. Glenn, Ted. (2014). Professional Communications in the Public Sector: A Practical Guide. Canadian Scholars' Press (pbk. 1-55130-631-5, pdf. 978-1-55130-632-2, epub 978-1-55130-633-9). Approx. \$66.95

One copy of each will be on reserve in the library. We will also provide you a number of other materials, which will be posted on the course website.

While not required reading – one of the themes that will be consistent in the course is ethics and some of the very unique challenges that public servants face in government and the broader public sector. Students are encouraged to read:

Kernaghan, K and Langford, J. (2014). The Responsible Public Servant. Second Edition. Institute of Public Administration of Canada. Approx. \$20.00

Structure of Lectures and Tutorials

The course will be delivered in two distinct formats – lectures and tutorials.

Lectures

Each lecture will consist of a formal presentation, outlining key lessons and learning outcomes for each of the weeks and themes. In the lecture, the Course Director will raise your awareness of the application of the material from the assigned readings, present the best information we have based on the leading research, and will highlight best practices and practical realities that have emerged. The lectures will not replace the necessity to have completed your readings assigned for each week, rather, they will draw out key lessons and focus on their application. Each week lecture slides will be posted on the course website.

Tutorials

The two-hour tutorial held each week will consist of role-playing exercises, workshops and simulations. You will apply the readings and your critical thinking skills when playing your assigned role in the exercise. The purpose is to take research and theory, coupled with best practices and merge the two in an interactive and hands-on manner. The tutorial leader will also use the time to engage with students to ensure comfort with materials and allow plenty of time for questions and discussion. Tutorials will also be used to allow students to make presentations and to get feedback on writing assignments. The tutorials are critical for student success – the participation grade is 20%, which reflects the importance placed on engagement in this class.

Evaluation

| Assignment | Value | Due Date |
|---|-------|---|
| Individual Writing Assignment #1 (Cover Letter and Resume) | 20% | Week 4 via eClass |
| Individual Presentation #1 (Interview) | 10% | Week 6 in tutorial |
| Individual Writing Assignment #2 (Briefing Note) | 20% | Week 8 via eClass |
| Individual Presentation # 2 (Professional Briefing) | 10% | Week 10 in tutorial |
| Class Participation and Professionalism | 20% | Throughout each lecture and tutorial |
| Term Test | 20% | Week 12 – In-class (during lecture) |

NOTE:

One of the realities of the workplace is that deadlines and due dates are firm. All assignments are expected to be handed in on time or else they will not be accepted and a mark of zero will be assigned to them. If you expect to have difficulty in completing an assignment on time, please discuss this with the instructor in advance.

Writing Assignments (20% each)

There are two (2) writing assignments assigned within the tutorial and submitted via eClass on the due dates noted above. Additional details of the scope of the assignment and expectations will be provided to students at the start of the course.

Class Participation and Professionalism (20%)

A record of attendance will be kept for every week. If you must miss a class, it is expected that you will give notice to the Course Director and Tutorial Leader as early as possible. Passive attendance will not be assessed positively. As leaders you will be required to be an effective contributor to group discussions and meetings. Class discussions serve as an excellent means to practice this important skill. While assessing your class participation, you will be evaluated not merely on how often you participate, but how your answers/questions lead to improved learning among your classmates. For class discussions, you may be asked questions that require you to describe something (e.g. a finding from your readings, your experiences in the exercises), define concepts, argue for and against a hypothesis, or critically analyze the readings and relate them to your experiences. You will be evaluated on your contributions at every class based on clearly defined expectations, which are indicated above (see Class Participation and Professionalism).

Learning to work together in teams is an important aspect of your education and preparation for your future careers. Some simulations require students to work in teams. When working as a team, students are reminded of the following expectations with respect to their behavior and contributions to the project: Each team member is expected to:

- Treat other members with courtesy and respect;
- Establish a positive and productive team dynamic;
- Contribute substantially to the group simulation; and,
- Ensure familiarity with the entire contents of the simulation.

Individual Presentations (10% each)

To build public speaking skills, each student will deliver two presentations. The first presentation will be a simulation of a job interview and the second presentation will take the form of a professional briefing on a topic approved by the instructor. Details will be provided by the instructor closer to the date.

Term Test (20%)

The term test is based on all the readings and role-play exercises/workshops/simulation that are part of the requirements of the class and require you to reflect and write about how you used the relevant research on a skill while you were planning and executing your role in the role-play. It is important to attend all class sessions. More details about the format will be provided closer to the end of the term.

Citations

In this course the APA Style of citation is required for course assignments. In support of the university's academic integrity policies, it's essential students appropriately reference sources relied upon in written submissions. Additional information on the APA Style can be found at:

- [SPARK Student Papers & Academic Research Kit](#)
- [APA Style Overview, YorkU Libraries](#)
- [Drop-in Research Support, YorkU Libraries](#)
- [Writing Centre](#)

Grading

The grading scheme for this course conforms to the 9-point system used in undergraduate programs at York University. For a full description of the York grading system, visit the York University [Academic Calendar](#).

| GRADE | GRADE POINT | PERCENT RANGE | DESCRIPTION |
|-------|-------------|---------------|--------------------|
| A+ | 9 | 90-100 | Exceptional |
| A | 8 | 80-89 | Excellent |
| B+ | 7 | 75-79 | Very Good |
| B | 6 | 70-74 | Good |
| C+ | 5 | 65-69 | Competent |
| C | 4 | 60-64 | Fairly Competent |
| D+ | 3 | 55-59 | Passing |
| D | 2 | 50-54 | Marginally Passing |
| E | 1 | 40-49 | Marginally Failing |
| F | 0 | 0-39 | Failing |

Re-grading Policy and Procedure

If, after looking over the written comments of the marker, and the marks you have received, you feel that your work deserves re-consideration, you must observe the following procedures:

- Create a typed note containing the following: (i) Your name, (ii) Your Student Number, (iii) The criteria against which you believe you have been graded incorrectly, and (iv) An explanation of why the marker has overlooked or misunderstood your assignment's merits. Ideally what this means is you create the perfect, textbook answer from your materials and then provide a comparison to your answer.
- Handwritten submissions will not be considered, it shows a lack of serious intent.
- Re-grading will be based only on what you submit in writing, not what you might communicate with your Professor verbally.
- Email your typed note to your graded assignment and submit it to your Professor by the end of the class in the following week.
- If you are unable to attend the following week's class for any reason, email your re-grading request to the Professor. Your Professor will re-grade the entire written material. Re-grading means that your answers will be re-evaluated, and a new grade may be assigned. This means that it is possible to lose marks as well as to gain marks through re-grading.
- Please do not submit your materials for re-grading unless you are confident that a grading error has occurred. Re-graded materials should be available to you the following week, although occasionally a response may take two weeks.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with and adhere to the [Senate Academic Conduct Policy and Procedures](#). Students are responsible for understanding the nature and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism, cheating on an exam, submitting false assignments, impersonating another student, or submitting for credit any work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in the University or elsewhere. In writing scholarly papers, you must keep firmly in mind the need to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged borrowing of another writer's words and ideas. If you are in doubt about whether what you are doing is inappropriate, please consult your instructor. The use of AI for this course is prohibited unless otherwise instructed. The instructor is happy to help, but transgressions will be pursued vigorously, and students will be subject to academic penalties.

| Week | Date | Lectures Topics/Readings/Assignments/Due Dates | Tutorial Topics/Readings/Assignments/Due Dates |
|------|----------|--|---|
| 1 | Sept. 8 | Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the objectives of the course. Review of timetable and expectations. Presentation by instructor. Workplace Expectations <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 1, 2 and 3 Public Policy Forum, Workplace 2.0: the changing nature of work, 2011 | (NO TUTORIAL) |
| 2 | Sept. 15 | Workplace Professionalism, Inclusive Workplaces and Ethics – (including legislation and themes related to conflict of interest) <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 4 | Introductions, Logistics, and Review of Key Concepts |
| 3 | Sept. 22 | Career Planning I – Job Applications (Cover letters and resumes) for the Government and Broader Public Sector <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 15 Ontario Public Service, Writing a Cover Letter and Resume (eClass) Applying for Jobs in the Ontario public service (eClass) | Resume and Cover Letter Writing Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in exercises to develop their cover letter and resume. |
| 4 | Sept. 29 | Career Planning II - Job Interviews in the Government and Broader Public Sector <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 15 Applying for Jobs in the Ontario public service (eClass) | Job Interview Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in simulations and role play in preparation for graded presentations in week 6. Individual Writing Assignment #1 (Cover letter and resume) due today via eClass (20%). |
| 5 | Oct. 6 | Professional Writing I – Correspondence and Email Standards (this includes legislation and regulations relevant to the public sector, including those relating to confidentiality, transparency, and privacy protection, such as the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act). <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glenn, Chapters 1 and 2 Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 7 | Professional Writing Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in exercises to write professional emails and other formal correspondence. |
| 6 | Oct. 20 | Professional Writing II – Clear Writing and Key Message Development <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glenn, Chapters 3 and 4 Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 7 | Individual Presentation #1- Job Interview (10%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in 5-minute job interviews (graded). |

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| 7 | Oct. 27 | Professional Writing III – Briefing Notes <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glenn, Chapter 7. Peter Constantinou, On Briefing Ministers, Policy Options. Briefing Note format and case materials provided by instructor. | Briefing Note Writing Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in a briefing note workshop with group work. Instructions for Individual Writing Assignment #2 (Briefing Note) will be reviewed. |
| 8 | Nov. 3 | Presentation Skills <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dawn Angier, How to Deliver Highly Effective Presentations (eClass) | Presentations Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in simulations and role play in preparation for graded presentations in week 10. Individual Writing Assignment #2 (Briefing Note) due today via eClass (20%). |
| 9 | Nov. 10 | Networking and Soft Skills in a 2.0 World <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 9 and 14 Glenn, Chapter 9 | Networking Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in simulations and work in groups to prepare and practice delivering an “elevator pitch.” |
| 10 | Nov. 17 | Group Dynamics, Conflict Resolution and Team Work <i>Required readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aamodt and Raynes, Chapter 5, 6 and 8 | Individual Presentation #2- Professional Briefing (10%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will deliver a 5-minute presentation (graded). |
| 11 | Nov. 24 | Excel Workshop | Term Test Review |
| 12 | Dec. 1 | Term Test (20%) In-class/session, closed-book administration. Time allotment may extend beyond scheduled timeframe of regular one-hour lecture period. | (NO TUTORIAL) |