Introduction
To excel in your graduate studies and future professional endeavors, you must cultivate strong verbal and written communication skills. Employers of Bren School graduates consistently identify strong communication skills as the most important factor that influences hiring and advancement of employees. All incoming MESM students are required to participate in a three-part writing workshop. During the writing workshop, we will discuss principles of excellent writing, and students will write a policy brief on a current topic and engage in an evaluation process. The workshop offers a nurturing environment for students to learn and practice graduate-level writing skills.

Timeline

Monday, September 22 at 1-2 pm: Writing Workshop Part I. Introduction to the principles of excellent writing. Students will receive an assignment to write a policy brief and the rubric describing essential elements of writing. Students will use this prompt and the reference materials to write a policy brief, integrating principles of excellent writing. The focus of this activity is NOT on your knowledge of the topic. Instead, we will focus on your writing.

Friday, September 26 at 1-2:15 pm: Writing Workshop Part II. Your policy brief is due! Please submit an electronic copy of your policy brief to Camile Clementi (camile@bren.ucsb.edu) by Friday, September 26 at 1 pm. Please use the unique document name of “LAST NAME_FIRST NAME_Writing_Workshop_2014.” Print two hard copies of your policy brief. Bring the printed copies and a pen or pencil to the Writing Workshop Part II in Bren Hall 1414 on Friday, September 26 at 1 pm. You will share your policy brief with two other students and you will receive two policy briefs from other students. You will use the rubric to evaluate the policy briefs and provide your evaluations to the instructor. The instructor and Bren School writing tutors Adam Jorge and Lauren Steely will review your comments and remove the names of the reviewers from the hard copy evaluations. Staff will return the anonymous evaluations to students’ mailboxes by Tuesday, September 30 at 11:30 am.

Tuesday, September 30 at 11:30 am – 12:30 pm. Bren Faculty Panel: Wildfire Risk and Climate Change presented by Professors Sarah Anderson, Andrew Plantinga, Naomi Tague, and Assistant Dean Satie Airamé.

Tuesday, September 30 at 1 – 2:15 pm: Writing Workshop Part III. The instructor will give an overview of the evaluations of policy briefs during the final review session. The Bren School writing tutors will share their advice about how to address any problems that emerged in the policy briefs. You will receive additional information about opportunities at the Bren School to cultivate and refine your writing and other communication skills.

Prompt
“The U.S. Forest Service has managed wildland fire for more than 100 years. Fire management is central to meeting the Forest Service mission of conserving natural resources, restoring ecological health, and protecting communities. Climate change, the growth of communities into wildlands, and the buildup of flammable vegetation have made managing fire riskier and more complex” (U.S. Forest Service 2013). To meet these challenges, the Forest Service is developing new strategies for managing wildland fire.

For this assignment, you are an advisor to U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. Your assignment is to write a policy brief (500 – 750 words) with recommendations to the Chief on how to proceed with fire management in U.S. National Forests. In your policy brief, explain how the changing climate will affect wildfire risk and what fire management strategies will be most effective. Some historical fire management strategies include removal of flammable vegetation, controlled burns, fire suppression, allowing fires to burn in remote areas, and post-fire restoration. Provide a brief but thoughtful evaluation of the benefits and costs of the management strategies that you present. Take into account not just the economic aspects of the policy, but also the political consequences for an agency that must report to Congress and the president. Include a clear recommendation on how you think Chief Tidwell should proceed. [Remember that the purpose of the assignment is to apply the principles of excellent writing; you will not be evaluated on the actual merit of your policy recommendation. Focus on a strong and well-supported recommendation, presented in a logical structure in clear and compelling language.]
What is a policy brief? A policy brief is a document that outlines the rationale for choosing a particular policy alternative in a current policy debate. The brief may provide a discussion of alternatives and the benefits and costs of each without arguing for a particular one. Alternatively, the brief may argue directly for the adoption of one particular alternative. The purpose of the policy brief is to provide the reader (Chief Tidwell, in this case) with sufficient information that he will be able to assess alternatives and confidently select a preferred alternative or course of action. An effective policy brief should be: focused, professional, evidence-based, and succinct. For more information on how to compose a policy brief, refer to: http://www.policy.hu/ipf/fel-pubs/samples/PolicyBrief-described.pdf developed by Eoin Young and Lisa Quinn.

Word limit. You should limit your policy brief to no more than 750 words. [In the guidelines referenced above, the recommended length of a standard professional policy brief is no more than 6-8 pages and 3,000 words. For this assignment, please keep your policy brief under 750 words.]

Quotes. You may include one or several direct quotes to support your statements. If you include quotes, you should follow the APA/MLA guidelines for citation formatting. For more information on APA/MLA guidelines for citations, visit the Purdue Online Writing Lab at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/.

References. Below you will find a list of selected papers about wildfire by scientists and economists. Carefully review 3-5 of these papers. The papers may provide perspectives with which you may or may not agree. Use your analytical skills to evaluate the data and conclusions in the papers. In your policy brief, present what you believe is the best management strategy (or combination of strategies) for fire management based on the available science (from this selection of papers).

You should not look up any other sources to accomplish this exercise, and you do not need to have any specific expertise in the subject. Instead, we will be discussing your writing for general organization, logical flow, and clarity, not disciplinary knowledge.

You should include a reference section at the end of your policy brief. Please feel free to copy and paste the citations directly from the prompt.

Potential References (Choose 3-5)