

Student and Faculty/Educator Views on Diversity and Inclusion in Public Relations: The Role of Leaders in Bringing About Change

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ABSTRACT

The state of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the U.S. public relations industry lags concerningly behind increasing societal diversity. Research indicates a strong link between D&I success and leadership involvement. This qualitative study takes a slightly different approach from previous studies on the topic of leadership, D&I, and public relations. Instead of focusing on industry leadership, it focuses on public relations education. Students are the future leaders of the industry, and faculty/educators shape these future leaders. The current weak school-to-industry D&I flow, which is clearly connected to the industry's D&I problem, is the focus of this study. In-depth interviews with students and faculty/educators who stand out for their leadership and dedication to D&I revealed both groups have an accurate picture of the D&I problem in industry and education. They clearly understand the responsibility of leadership and offer suggestions for improvement. We use the views of these leaders in the education setting as a platform to explain how the education-industry D&I continuum can benefit from their knowledge, skills, and abilities and offer some concrete suggestions for actionable change.

Keywords: public relations, education, leadership, diversity, inclusion

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The state of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the public relations industry in the United States is a major concern. The country is diversifying quickly, and current minority groups will collectively constitute a majority by 2050 or earlier (Lee, 2008). In the face of this reality, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018 figures report that only about 15% of the PR industry is racially diverse. Other estimates are even lower (see Chitkara, 2018). Inclusion remains an equally important concern because recruitment without inclusion hurts retention (Feloni, 2017). Furthermore, women constitute approximately 70% of the industry, while men are a minority but overwhelmingly dominate senior level positions (Logan, 2011; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Despite numerous calls and initiatives for change for over three decades, the industry's D&I needle has barely moved.

Leadership research shows a strong link between D&I success and leadership efforts. The public relations trade press is full of advice on this point. According to senior practitioner Hugo Balta (2015), "In order for diversity to fulfill its true possibility, top leaders need to create a workplace environment where employees understand that their voices are valued and accepted" (para. 5). According to Van Camp (2012), "Engage top leadership on the issue and help them understand, if they don't already, that although often hard to quantify, diversity initiatives have a significant ROI" (para. 15). However, the slim research that exists on the topic in public relations indicates that leadership engagement with D&I is concerningly low and that senior leaders see themselves as playing a much bigger role than those not in formal leadership roles (Bardhan et al., 2018).

This qualitative interview-based study takes a slightly different approach to the topic of leadership, public relations, and D&I. Instead of focusing directly on industry leadership, it focuses on education. According to Pompper (2005), "The status of public relations practice is directly linked to public relations education" (p. 299). Students are the

future leadership of the industry. How are they, and those who educate them, thinking about D&I and leadership's role in advancing D&I? Student and faculty/educator perspectives are important to understand for developing strategies and approaches for actionable change and for highlighting leadership's role and responsibility in the effort to improve the state of D&I in the education-industry continuum.

Public Relations Education and D&I

According to Brown et al. (2019), "Diversity must start at the classroom level in order for emerging practitioners to embrace diversity at the professional level" (p. 19). The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE), which currently comprises 18 national and international professional and academic communication associations and accreditation bodies, clearly emphasizes the pressing need to make D&I an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum. Founded in 1973, the CPRE plays an influential role in shaping public relations curricula through its recommendations based on surveys of educators and practitioners (DiStaso, 2019). According to its most recent survey-based report:

In order to see D&I within the public relations industry flourish, change must begin at the academic level through a more diverse student and educator base, and through changes in how D&I is taught at the educational level. This school-to-industry pipeline will result in a more diverse workforce. (Mundy et al., 2018, p. 139)

Of particular interest to this study is that the survey found practitioners value D&I knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) slightly more than educators and note the lack of these KSAs in students currently graduating from public relations programs (DiStaso, 2019; Mundy et al., 2018).

The CPRE has also developed a comprehensive and nuanced definition of D&I based on past research (see Sha & Ford, 2007). It divides diversity into primary and secondary aspects. The primary aspects

are characteristics people are born with that cannot be changed (e.g., age, race). The secondary dimensions are those that can be altered (e.g., religion, marital status, social class). The definition emphasizes that these two dimensions of diversity play a key role in how people communicate within organizations and that understanding this phenomenon is crucial to how inclusion is practiced with internal and external publics. For overall D&I success, the CPRE emphasizes practitioners should keep in stride with the organization's external D&I environment and demographics, make full use of the diversity present within an organization to enhance work environments and relationships, be fully aware of the power differentials that might exist between the organization and its various publics, and develop mechanisms for "listening to and proactively engaging disenfranchised and other possibly marginalized groups" (Commission on Public Relations Education, n.d., para. 13).

Against the backdrop of urgent calls regarding the concerning state of D&I in the public relations industry and the need to educate students in ways that respond to this situation, the literature reveals that the bulk of research on public relations and D&I focuses on the industry with meager attention paid to education, a fact also noted by other scholars (Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Place & Vanc, 2016). More recently in June and July 2020, following the racial justice upheavals in the country, a series of live online discussions titled "Race in the PR Classroom," jointly hosted by the Institute for Public Relations and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educators Academy, focused on issues related to race and D&I that urgently need to be addressed in public relations pedagogy ("Race in the PR Classroom," n.d.). What was originally scheduled to last for only three sessions developed into a monthly series because of the valuable conversations and resources these Zoom meetings provided.

The speakers discussed the need to develop anti-racist public relations pedagogy that benefits all students and the need to disrupt

Whiteness in public relations pedagogy (“Race in the PR Classroom,” n.d.). In addition, they called upon White faculty to incorporate race and D&I in their teaching/scholarship and to work as allies with faculty of color. Suggestions were offered for ways to hire more tenure-track faculty of color. The speakers also discussed the importance of bringing in diverse guest speakers and adjunct faculty of color, as well as the need to diversify the curriculum across the board rather than limiting D&I discussions to one day or to one course. Overall, there is a clear gap in knowledge on this aspect of public relations pedagogy. The scant research that does exist on D&I and public relations education is elaborated upon next.

There are at least two aspects to D&I in public relations education: (1) the curriculum and (2) the recruitment of diverse students and faculty. Combining these two aspects, what students learn and who they see around them in classrooms and related environments, impacts how they view D&I in relation to the profession and their own role and prospects in it (Brown et al., 2011; Mundy et al., 2018; Pompper, 2005; Waymer & Brown, 2018; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). Brunner’s (2005) study of diversity environments at two public higher education institutions in the United States highlights that all students, both underrepresented and majority group students, take their cues on how to orient to D&I from their university environments:

Since students come to universities at a critical time in their development as human beings, diversity is essential. During this time, students define themselves in relation to others, experiment with roles, and begin to make permanent commitments to careers, social groups, and personal relationships. (p. 4)

Brunner reviews scholarship that shows both majority and underrepresented students on more diverse campuses are likely to be more open to diverse cultures/views and navigate diversity issues in thoughtful, inclusive, and creative ways.

Through her focus group study that explored the views of African-American female practitioners, Pompper (2005) found that the curricula is “still out of step with multicultural world realities” (p. 310). Waymer and Dyson (2011), in a qualitative study on race and public relations pedagogy, made the point that while it is necessary to teach the technical skills needed to qualify for entry-level jobs, that is not enough. However, historically that has been the focus of the prescribed curriculum for undergraduate education (see McKie & Munshi, 2009). They argue that for students to be socially, ethically, and culturally attuned practitioners, they “must be prepared to engage in critical, reflective discussion and argument about the most pressing issues of contemporary society” (pp. 461-462). They further observed that while diversity and multiculturalism are emphasized in accreditation standards, content does not get included in systematic ways in the day-to-day teaching and applied work that students engage in. The authors also examined how faculty perceptions of race impact how they teach it. Faculty reported the topic of race is almost non-existent in the curriculum and in textbooks, and that the content that does exist is “shallow and misrepresented” and focuses mainly on demographics (p. 473). They expressed wanting to teach more robust and meaningful race-related content but reported the lack of materials to do this well. Back in the 1980s, public relations educator and leader Marilyn Kern-Foxworth (1989) cogently made the same point about the invisibility of the role and contributions of people of color in the major textbooks used for education. Waymer and Dyson’s (2011) study suggested this invisibility had not changed much in 20 years.

Regarding the second aspect—the recruitment of diverse students and faculty—extant research suggests that for recruitment and retention to be successful, there must be a clear understanding of why students from underrepresented groups choose (or do not choose) public relations as a major, and why they stay or pick another major. Brown et al. (2011)

conducted a qualitative interview-based study of undergraduate African-American public relations students at three U.S. universities and found the reasons they chose the major was the same as other students (i.e., usually by accident, see Bowen, 2009); but once they enter the major, race plays somewhat of a role. The interviewees expressed not wanting to be pigeonholed or expected to represent their entire race and wanting to see more faculty and mentors who look like them. They also generally felt their Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter environment was not too welcoming, especially at first.

A more recent qualitative interview-based study by Waymer and Brown (2018) asked African-American, Latinx, White and Asian-American practitioners with five or fewer years of industry experience to reflect on their undergraduate education environment and how that helped or hurt them in terms of academic success and entry into the profession. While no major negatives emerged, underrepresented group participants reported being a minority was uncomfortable at times, and they felt they had to work harder than White students to prove themselves. The White respondents said while race was a non-factor for them, they were aware of how students of color had to put in additional effort. Another recent study, which focused on current students, revealed more negative findings. In a quantitative survey ($N=294$) of public relations majors from eight colleges and universities, Brown et al. (2019) found race and gender had a significant impact on the experiences of undergraduate public relations students. In this study, 66% of the respondents were White, 16% Latinx, 9% African-American, and 7% of other races/ethnicities. Also, only 16% of the respondents were male. Specifically, they found White female respondents, the majority demographic in most undergraduate public relations programs, have the most positive experience, both educationally as well as socially. Minority group students “were less likely to build a professional network in PR, build a strong support group among other

public relations students, and experience comfort interacting with other students in the classroom and in extracurricular activities” (p. 17). The authors suggest more diverse faculty and professionals should be visible and available to mentor underrepresented students and help them network professionally.

Place and Vanc (2016) conducted a qualitative interview-based study of mainly White undergraduate public relations students from three mid-size universities to examine if exposure to diversity through service learning and client work within coursework impacted students’ views about diversity dynamics in the profession. Findings showed the students were mostly fearful of diversity, perceived it in negative ways (e.g., problem, challenge, struggle), and described diversity as something “different from me.” While they generally had difficulty coming to terms with their own White privilege, the responses also indicated that the students gained some sense of how diverse client environments are and how to better understand diversity in a professional and broader social context as compared to just the personal context. The authors concluded that how public relations students orient to D&I in school has serious implications for the kinds of stereotypes, assumptions, and biases they carry into the industry. Similarly, Muturi, and Zhu (2019) conducted a quantitative survey ($N = 417$) of mainly White public relations, advertising, and journalism students at a large Midwestern university to gauge diversity exposure (with a focus on race/ethnicity) through coursework and related activity and its impact. While the public relations students seemed to fare slightly better, all students reported moderate diversity exposure and limited understanding of how race/ethnicity issues relate to the professional world. The authors of the above two studies pointed out the lack of and need for more studies on the complex dimensions of the school-to-industry D&I flow.

Regarding recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, Pompper’s

(2005) study offers specific insights. Her African-American female practitioner participants reported that unfortunately, the curriculum will not improve unless diversity among faculty improves. They emphasized homogeneity among faculty equals a shortage of mentors and role models for students from underrepresented groups. This, in turn, can impact the student perception of their prospects of success. Additionally, they suggested that faculty who do not avow diverse identities often feel unprepared to teach about cultural, racial/ethnic, and other differences, and that all faculty should continually educate and train themselves to teach through the lens of multiculturalism so that students do not continue to “absorb an Anglo Eurocentric worldview that perpetuates the cycle of de-valuing, overlooking, marginalizing, pigeonholing, and stereotyping minorities” (p. 310). Others also noted the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and adjuncts, incorporating diverse guest speakers, creating experiences that expose all students to diverse experiences (e.g., shadowing, internships, mentoring, client work), training current faculty, and keeping diversity and its measurement high on the agenda of higher education leaders (Accreditation Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, 2018; Brown et al., 2019; Mundy et al., 2018; Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Place & Vanc, 2016).

Limitations of Extant Studies

Overall, the scant research on the topic suggests there is a clear need to better understand and address the D&I dynamics of public relations education and how that impacts the D&I dimensions of the industry. Extant research shows that the curriculum is still not adequately incorporating diverse course content despite ongoing calls from accreditation bodies and professional associations. Homogeneity among students and especially faculty persists, and racial/ethnic minority students who do pick public relations generally report feeling they do not belong in the major as much as White students. Underrepresented students

emphasize the need for more mentoring and networking assistance from diverse faculty and professionals. Most importantly, White students, who constitute a majority, seem not to think too much about the relationship between practice and D&I and/or struggle with diversity when exposed to it. This literature corroborates the CPRE report's finding that universities are not producing the D&I-related skills and knowledge the industry is seeking (Mundy et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the meager research that exists began only a little over a decade ago and only a handful of educators/scholars have been pursuing this topic. Diversity and inclusion in higher education, not just public relations education (and research), should be every educator's priority and not just of those who identify as belonging to underrepresented groups (Brunner, 2005; Mundy et al., 2018). Another limitation in the research landscape is that until now, studies have focused mainly on the race/ethnicity and gender dimensions of D&I in public relations education. Since race/ethnicity is a central marker of identity as well as inequity in the U.S., this focus makes sense. The gender focus also makes sense given the significant gender power imbalance in public relations education and the industry. However, more dimensions of race/ethnicity (the focus so far has mainly been on African-American and White students) and other aspects of diversity and difference, both primary and secondary, need to be studied (Mundy et al., 2018). Finally, studies of curriculum content and recruitment/retention efforts for diverse faculty and students seem to be non-existent.

Research Questions

Combining the findings of extant studies, our interest in exploring the D&I-leadership link that has not been studied before in the education context, CPRE's latest report's comprehensive definition of D&I, and its call to better prepare the school-to-industry flow to work inclusively with

diverse publics, we posed the following overarching research questions for this study:

- What are the views of current public relations student leaders and faculty/educators invested in D&I about the state of D&I in education and industry? How closely are they aligned with the recent definition of and suggestions regarding D&I forwarded by the CPRE?
- How do study participants view the role of industry leaders and educators in making D&I efforts successful?
- What do the overall findings suggest about actionable changes needed to improve the D&I dimensions of the school-to-industry flow?

Method

Qualitative in-depth interviewing was selected as the method for this study because this discovery-oriented method is well suited for examining topics on which little information exists (Kvale, 1996; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Patton, 1987). An in-depth interview is a “conversation with a purpose” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 172) that aims to get at the reality of social actors’ experiences. There are various suggestions regarding how many in-depth interviews are sufficient for a study. The most common argument is that interviews can be stopped when saturation is reached (i.e., when no new information is forthcoming from the interviews). Typically, this point is achieved anywhere between 10 to 20 interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

The decision was made to recruit and interview 10 participants from two groups: undergraduate student leaders at different universities/colleges majoring in public relations and committed to D&I, and faculty/educators invested in D&I education and research at different universities/colleges. Human subjects approval was obtained for the study. A purposive sampling approach was followed. Students previously selected for scholarships and awards for their outstanding commitment to D&I were contacted. Faculty advisers of PRSSA chapters

were also contacted for recommendations of students leading the D&I charge in their chapters. Next, faculty/educators currently engaged in D&I research and education efforts were contacted and recruited. Saturation point was satisfactorily reached with these 20 interviews and, therefore, more interviewees were not recruited. All interviews were conducted between November 2018 and August 2019 over the phone, recorded with permission, and then transcribed. All interviewees were ascribed pseudonyms for confidentiality and data reporting purposes. The student interviewees comprised four seniors, five juniors and one sophomore from universities/colleges in the Midwest, East Coast, Northeast and Southern parts of the U.S. The faculty/educators ranged between 8 to 39 years in terms of teaching experience. Five had significant industry experience before entering academia (up to 35 years), four had fewer years while one had none. Tables 1 and 2 show the identity statements provided by the interviewees. Instead of collecting cultural data in a directed, closed-question format, we asked the interviewees to describe their identities in their own words.

Table 1

Student Leader Respondent Identities

Student Pseudonym/ Year	Identity Statement
Sharif (senior)	“I am a Muslim Arab Yemeni American.”
Jasmine (senior)	“I am a Nigerian, American born.”
Barb (senior)	“Upper middle class, White background. I was raised Catholic, Christian.”

Mia (senior)	“I’m a multicultural individual and I have family from Brazil, Israel, France, Lebanon, Poland . . . a huge part of me is my nationality and my religion so I identify as a Venezuelan Jewish woman.”
William (junior)	“American-Colombian. I was born in Colombia and was adopted and moved to Upstate NY when I was young. I was raised in an all-White culture in a small town.”
Derek (junior)	“African-American, Black, first generation college student, urban.”
Dave (junior)	“African-American homosexual male from the south who grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood . . . my cultural identity is always evolving.”
Ben (junior)	“I’m American, but my mother came from Jamaica . . . I tend to be very traditional mainly because I grew up in the Panhandle, which is like deep south.”
Jane (junior)	“I’m White and from a smaller rural farm community in Minnesota.”
Sheena (sophomore)	“African-American woman.”

Table 2*Faculty/Educator Respondent Identities*

Faculty/Educator Pseudonym	Identity Statements
Laura	“I’m Caucasian.”
Mimi	“Eastern European and German.”

John	“A White guy from a small rural Indiana town who fortunately had an amazing career that allowed him to see the larger world.”
Terrence	“I identify as African American. I am biracial. My mother is White, my father is Black.”
Jerry	“I am a White male, but I am a gay southerner . . . my dad’s family is from Mexico originally. My mom’s family has been in North Carolina for like 300 years.”
Marie	“Female, Caucasian, heterosexual, Protestant, TAB (temporarily able bodied), mid-life aged.”
Shana	“I am an African American woman. That’s what I am. From the south, that’s also very important.”
Susan	“I really kind of think of myself as White female, lower-middle class, heterosexual, highly educated.”
Gordon	“I am a father, a husband, a son, Black male, born in the Southeast United States, who loves family and is concerned about how do you raise a Black boy today in the southern United States, or the United States in general. Educator. Researcher. Advocate. Political Sociologist.”

Valerie	“I am a Caucasian, European American. I am a lesbian. I don’t know if you care about age, I’m 64 years old. I’m middle class. So primarily your average blessed White woman.”
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Two closely aligned semi-structured questionnaires that included open-ended questions were developed, one for students and one for faculty/educators. All interviewees in each group were asked the same questions in the same order. Two key criteria for developing sound interview protocols were followed—alignment with research questions and inquiry-based questions to encourage conversation and in-depth perspectives (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The first set of questions were designed to elicit how students and faculty/educators understand the concepts “diversity” and “inclusion” and the relationship between them, as well as their views about the state of D&I in the public relations industry. The next set of questions asked what they believe industry leaders need to be doing to improve the situation. The final set of questions asked what they believe educators need to do to better prepare students to engage with D&I. Other demographic information was also collected.

Qualitative interviews are commonly analyzed using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is:
 an interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically event/action/interaction, and so forth, are compared against others for similarities and differences; they are also conceptually labelled. In this way, conceptually similar ones are grouped together to form categories and their subcategories. (p. 432)

Axial coding is the process of identifying the relationships between the open coding categories and subcategories and collapsing them to develop themes that describe and explain the phenomenon/condition under investigation. For each set of questions in the interview protocols

and across all 10 interviews in each group, the authors first conducted a line-by-line examination of the responses and engaged in open coding to develop categories and subcategories. Next axial coding was conducted to develop themes for each line of questioning. Finally, the authors returned to the research questions posed for the study and applied these themes to address them.

Results

In this section, we describe the results that emerged through our coding and analysis of the interviews we conducted with student leaders and faculty/educators invested in D&I.

The Relationship Between “Diversity” and “Inclusion”

Three themes emerged through open and axial coding of the responses under this first line of questioning: (1) diversity and inclusion are not the same, (2) diversity and inclusion are interlinked, and (3) definitions need to be broader, complex, and more flexible. Responses from student leaders are marked by (S) and faculty/educators by (F/E).

Diversity and Inclusion Are Not the Same

Both groups indicated they understand the difference between “diversity” and “inclusion” and that diversity does not automatically lead to inclusion. They described diversity mostly in terms of differences. According to Derek (S), diversity means people who “do not share the same agenda because of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., coming together in one place. ... [it is a] combination of different cultures and different backgrounds of people.” According to Laura (F/E): “I define diversity as the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of competitive individuals who represent our society without discrimination based on gender, or sexual orientation, race, religion, age, socioeconomic status, including those with disabilities and who are other abled.”

Sheena (S) said diversity means “recognizing and acknowledging and respecting the different aspects of people that are visible and non-visible.” Jane (S) grew up in a rural area and came to a big city to study,

and for her, diversity equals “race, social class, religion, where one grew up (rural/urban) and so on.” For Mia (S), an international student, diversity equals “culture, gender, opinions, religion, race, etc.” Dave (S) emphasized that diversity is an “everyday” thing and “it is what we eat, the music we listen to, what we wear, the languages we speak, and the people we speak to.” Mimi (F/E) said that in the classroom context, she prefers “to define diversity in very broad terms so that everyone is contributing something to diversity” and all groups—majority and minoritized—can participate meaningfully in the conversation. Susan (F/E) emphasized a diverse organization is one that reflects the increasingly diversifying publics it attempts to connect with. Two students specifically stated that representation matters when it comes to diversity. As Dave (S) put it, you “can’t be what you can’t see.”

Both groups described inclusion mostly in terms of equity, empowerment, and belonging. All interviewees were of the view that inclusion entails creating an environment where all, no matter their background, feel heard, empowered, a sense of belonging, that their opinions matter, and they are valued (not pigeonholed), and that all have equality in opportunities to advance. According to Laura (F/E), inclusion is “an organization’s active commitment to create an open culture” and “a hospitable environment where all employees are included, productive, and feel respected and valued professionally and personally.” She and another faculty/educator (John) emphasized that inclusive cultures are impossible without support from senior leadership. Both groups were clear that diversity should not be just a matter of surface-level optics. Dave (S) and Jerry (F/E) put it quite simply—inclusion means having a “true” seat at the table.

Diversity and Inclusion are Interlinked

While stating that diversity and inclusion should not be conflated, both interview groups emphasized the critical link between the two

concepts. Sheena (S) shared the story of when she visited PRSSA's national assembly and was impacted by a keynote speaker who said that diversity means being asked to the party and inclusion means being asked to dance. Sharif (S) and three faculty/educators also mentioned this often-used analogy (attributed to D&I advocate and trainer Vernā Myers), clearly indicating the impact it has had upon D&I discourse. Gordon (F/E) described the diversity-inclusion relationship using the metaphor of "an artistic tossed salad, ...where people can experience and taste the flavors, but they are working toward a common goal because it's a salad. So, it's not a salad until it's all together." William (S) explained diversity is about "having an open and inviting attitude" towards various differences, and inclusion is about "acting upon it." For Derek (S), inclusion is "step two of diversity." Ben (S) said diversity and inclusion "hold hands."

Laura (F/E) explained that the term "inclusion" became popular when people began "realizing that they were getting people in the pipeline but weren't doing anything in the workplace to help them be successful." Valerie (F/E) said diversity cannot thrive without inclusion: "It's not just enough to pay lip service or say let's be tolerant. . . . it's really important that we really make an effort to learn about other people." According to Terrence (F/E):

I think that diversity is striving for people of difference in the workplace and in the public relations environment. And inclusion is the glue that keeps them there. . . . working together in a shared space that promotes creativity and effectiveness.

Mia (S) and Jane (S) emphasized "both [diversity and inclusion] are needed in order to have change," describing "change" as the positive outcomes of diversity (Jane).

Definitions Need to be Broader, Complex and More Flexible

The majority of interviewees in both groups pointed out that current notions of diversity are too narrow and need to include both

primary and secondary dimensions of difference. Several interviewees elaborated that diversity discourse often tends to focus on race and gender, which they do not believe is a broad enough view. According to Ben (S), diversity means “an environment where you have as many perspectives as possible.” In fact, Jerry (F/E) emphasized that perhaps the word “diversity” is not sufficient anymore and that we need language that better describes the complicated realities of cultural and power differences we work with in the industry. Marie (F/E) stressed the importance of considering the intersectional effects of different identity categories, for example, considering the effects of race/ethnicity and gender together rather than separately.

In making the point that diversity should be conceptualized in more complex and flexible ways, the majority of the interviewees said the industry should not define D&I too tightly. William (S) explained that diversity means different things to different people in different contexts (domestic and international) and that how we perform inclusion also changes. According to Dave (S), “The industry won’t evolve if we’re not evolving the definitions of the terms we’re using.” Several faculty/educators remarked how difficult it is to even agree on what public relations is, and that defining D&I would be an equal, if not greater, challenge. Like the students, they emphasized such an effort would be confining. A few student respondents favored a definition, stating it is hard to address a problem when one does not have a good grasp on it. Overall, both groups seemed to support the idea that something broader and less fixed, like a vision, would be helpful for building a sense of what we are collectively working towards in the industry when it comes to D&I.

State of D&I in the Public Relations Industry

The next set of questions inquired about the state of D&I in the industry. Four themes emerged under this line of questioning: (1) some

improvement but still a long way to go, (2) leaders need to be more open to change, (3) economic versus moral imperative, and (4) lack of authenticity.

Some Improvement But Still a Long Way To Go

Most of the students and about half of the faculty/educators said while there is a higher recognition of the problem and increased attention being paid to D&I, there is still a long way to go and a need for “a lot more action rather than talking” (Mia) (S). Jerry (F/E) noted that recruitment is working much better than retention. According to Terrence (F/E), efforts are in the “adolescent phase” and there is a big gap between awareness and execution/action. Like Mia (S), Valerie (F/E) said: “It seems to me that people talk about it constantly. . . . but there’s no tangible evidence that we’ve really moved the needle.” Ben (S) emphasized steps taken “need to be intentional to help ensure that the industry is reflective of the society that’s constantly changing and evolving.” Gordon (F/E) had a somewhat different take and said we should look at process as well as outcomes. The latter may still be far from what is needed, but the process should not be ignored because some people are sincerely trying and “it’s not all just lip service.”

About half of the faculty/educator respondents and a few students used words such as “abysmal,” “superficial,” “terrible,” and “shallow” to describe the current state of D&I in the industry. John (F/E) said:

The intention to do good is there, but the follow-through is totally lacking . . . not enough time is being spent in making sure there’s the kind of understanding throughout the organization to make diversity the priority that everyone says it is.

Jasmine (S) said the state of D&I in the industry is “minimal” from what she sees at conferences and networking events and even in her own program. She said it is hard to feel welcome and thrive under these conditions. A few other students also said minority students often do not

see themselves in a public relations career. Laura (F/E) added that implicit bias is a major hurdle in the path of D&I, as are the challenges faced by multicultural individuals, especially young professionals with less confidence.

Many of the students were very direct when acknowledging that the profession is still very White. Sharif said he sees “a sea of White people” at all the conferences but that he is not surprised. He explained that his teacher said on the first day to his very diverse class (at a university in a very large city): “As beautiful as this classroom looks and the diversity that is in this class, I just want you guys to all know that the industry does not look like this.”

The gender imbalance was also highlighted. Ben (S) said the industry profile is “off balance” because of the high number of women and “mostly White people in the field.” Jerry (F/E) specifically emphasized the need to address gender and power disparities, which to him is a “huge” issue. Beth (S), who identifies as coming from an upper middle-class White background, said she is very aware the field is “mostly White and female.” Shana (F/E) said the “White blonde sorority girl” stereotype of practitioners makes it hard for those who do not fit that image to see themselves in that role, and William (S) underscored the high need for more people of color. Gordon (F/E) said the weak school-to-industry D&I flow is a major hurdle in the path of improving the state of D&I in the industry.

Leaders Need to be More Open to Change

Shana (F/E) reiterated what research shows, stating that public relations is “a really White field. . . . [which is] incredibly tilted towards White men. . . . White men being the CEOs, and White women being the support staff.” Several student interviewees brought up the topic of leadership, specifically the problem with the homogeneity of senior leadership who, according to William (S), “don’t have the same

perspectives as most Americans. We need new, younger and more diverse people running the PR industry to keep up with the constant changes and positive progression.” Derek (S) added that “older leadership” has been too used to doing things the same way for too long and “hiring only a certain type of identity” and producing certain types of content. He explained younger employees are coming in with new ideas and ways of doing things and there is “pushback,” especially from senior leadership. He acknowledged some leaders are open to change but noted most are not. Jerry (F/E) emphasized the homogeneity of senior leadership is one of the biggest structural obstacles for D&I.

Sheena (S) noted that while there has been some progress in including more White women and LGBTQ individuals in leadership positions, there remains a clear lack of racial/ethnic diversity in top leadership. Beth (S) further pointed out it has become “normalized” to think men make better leaders, and this normalization happens not just in public relations but in larger society. A few faculty/educators explained since public relations is not a formal profession (like law or medicine), it is difficult to regulate for diversity and put more pressure on leadership. According to Terrence (F/E), only “truly effective, transformative leadership” that does not treat D&I as “window dressing” can counter all these obstacles.

Economic Versus Moral Imperative

Several faculty/educators spoke about the conflict between economic and moral imperatives. John (F/E) said the public relations world is “so driven by billability and the need to deliver results that people gravitate to those who look and think like they do, because it’s more efficient and quicker to get the results.” He emphasized intentionality is key and D&I has to almost be forced upon corporate America. Laura (F/E) reiterated:

The reality is that diversity will take a backseat to process, and

expediency . . . [companies are] going to take the most reliable, the easiest way for them to recruit individuals . . . it's the need and desire for companies to be efficient and make money, that is sort of the biggest obstacle to initially building in diversity into their operations.

Marie (F/E) added there is “too great a focus on the bottom line and business case arguments,” and Susan (F/E) said the main reason diversity is not flourishing in the industry is the “capitalistic society that is focused on profit and short-term accomplishments.” Mimi (F/E) added it is time to shift the conversation from “dollars and cents” to the “human element,” or what is good for society, and therefore the profession. Sharif (S), the only student who reflected on this topic, said this is not a polarized matter and that D&I should be linked to business objectives in meaningful ways. He did, however, emphasize that leaders must be personally invested in D&I efforts “simply because it's the right thing to do.”

Lack of Authenticity

Several interviewees in both groups mentioned they perceive a lack of authenticity when it comes to D&I efforts. Some cautioned diversity and inclusion are in danger of becoming just buzzwords if genuine actionable change is not achieved soon. Dave (S) made a skeptical comment, noting while D&I is being acknowledged more, it is probably because it is a trend. Sharif (S) added those with privilege need to acknowledge it, internalize it, and only then will authentic change take place. Several interviewees said another issue is that people are often afraid to offend or want to avoid conflict. Jasmine (S) insisted that, despite fears, it is important to find ways to have conversations about differences. Dave (S) expressed it is “more respectful to take the next step” (rather than be afraid) and say one wants to learn, so we can work together to make this world a better place.

The Responsibility of Industry Leadership

Two themes emerged under this line of questioning: (1) lead by example and communicate, and (2) personal engagement, responsibility, and accountability. The relationship between D&I and leadership inevitably came up in the previous lines of questioning, but this section got to the heart of this matter.

Lead by Example and Communicate

Both groups emphasized leaders should lead by example, although students emphasized this point a little more than faculty/educators.

According to Jane (S):

It has to start with top management because if they don't lead on it then it gets pushed down and doesn't happen. They should make sure there is equal opportunity and that staff reflects the audience they are trying to reach. You can't aim for a diverse audience if you only have one person of color on a team of like eight White people. It just doesn't work. That's when campaigns fail.

Mia added: "I think it always starts with setting an example."

Most of the interviewees said leaders must walk the talk, be authentic in their efforts, and that lip service is not enough. Ben (S) said leaders should be "pioneers" in communicating about D&I. He elaborated D&I language often gets put in writing (e.g., mission statements) and then forgotten. He emphasized it is the leader's "responsibility to be talking about these things and pushing these things and being as transparent as possible," and that even if D&I efforts aren't going so well or are just beginning, it is important to admit faults and mistakes and set up dialogue. Valerie (F/E) pointed out the importance of good leadership communication:

I think most of the people I can think of who run major organizations, corporations, they certainly do not come from a communication background and they do not understand the value

and the power of communications. They think they do, but they really don't.

Terrence (F/E) said, "We need leaders to be leading conversations. . . . they do not have to provide the answers, but if they are asking provocative questions and getting the right people sitting around the table, that can help produce change." He emphasized listening as a lost art that must be revived. Jasmine (S) said leaders should not communicate about D&I in "stock" ways as though they're "just trying to fill a quota" but in genuine ways that convey a real desire "to make the environment more diverse." She and Mia (S) also mentioned the importance of leadership talking about more than just racial diversity and about "people from different communities, different walks of life" (Mia). According to Mia (S), "The message should be to unite and to be inclusive and to think of equality, but in a much, much deeper sense, you know?"

Shana (F/E) said that unfortunately, leaders tend to focus more on the business aspect and less on the importance of communication in building healthy, diverse and inclusive work environments. Gordon (F/E) emphasized leaders need to be able to communicate to others why building relationships across differences (employees, clients, publics and other stakeholders) is important for the profession itself and for building a sense of community. Susan (F/E) referred to this as the need to communicate for "the greater good." Dave (S) said leaders need to "communicate realistically" and help others understand that things they might be doing may not be inclusive. Beth (S) added leaders should be "approachable and easy to talk to" and make everyone comfortable, that they should not simply listen but also encourage people to speak up. William (S) emphasized leaders need to share more positive and personal stories about how D&I engagement helped them in work and life and how they have overcome obstacles to bring about change. He added leaders should also include students (i.e., future leaders) in these conversations.

Personal Engagement, Responsibility and Accountability

Both groups agreed that D&I success and authenticity is just not possible without support and engagement from the top. Sheena (S) said:

I remember reading that research shows that employees are more engaged and creative and empowered when their senior leaders and people in the C-suite are the champions for diversity and inclusion. They have to set the tone and the precedent and let employees know all have value and that's important in the culture and success of the company.

Several faculty/educators noted how senior leaders tend to delegate the hiring process. John (F/E) explained:

The hiring decisions keep getting pushed down lower and lower in the organization, and unless in that hiring chain are diverse minds, they are going to hire someone who looks like themselves and thinks like they do.

He emphasized senior leaders should be involved in hiring for diversity, mentoring diverse junior employees, and building inclusive work cultures.

Personal engagement was linked to responsibility and accountability. Valerie (F/E) said, "We need hard data and CEOs willing to look at that data and make some tough decisions and make it a priority because the demographics that they're serving in this country are changing so rapidly." She added that "we really don't see a lot of bold moves to make the field look different," and that agency leaders need to come together and work collectively on D&I. Jerry (F/E) emphasized accountability, explaining "that it's not just creating a diverse board of leadership, but there's got to be some kind of accountability in terms of what they do with D&I initiatives in terms of moving the needle." Laura (F/E) said leaders need to take responsibility for outcomes: "One of the ways we measure success is how effective we are in recruiting and retaining diverse professionals, and I think that can only come from the top."

Most of the students remarked that industry leaders need to change their attitudes and perspectives regarding D&I and be more open to feedback. According to Sheena (S), leaders need to be “intentional” in their D&I work and in “reevaluating agency culture.” John (F/E) said agencies should not just hire diverse people and then “cut the bait the minute they stumble the first time.” Instead, leaders should be personally asking how they can help them succeed and what they themselves might be doing wrong. Laura (F/E) added leaders need to: “figure out ways that they can empower the leaders below them to be inclusive and welcoming and empowering people to do good work based on their capabilities and not on what their skin color is, not pigeonholing people.”

Terrence (F/E) emphasized values, stating they “allow the organization to make decisions that embrace diversity and inclusion.” According to Laura (F/E), those heading D&I “should have a seat at the table for high level corporate strategies.” Derek (S) observed that only those leaders and professionals who themselves identify as belonging to marginalized groups tend to talk about D&I and “that’s not good enough.” He said “more learning and unlearning of unconscious bias” needs to happen and “old mentalities” can only change if more diverse leaders are in place and if current leaders can be more self-reflective, open-minded, and able to talk courageously about the biases they hold and how they’re working on undoing them.

What Can Educators Do?

Three themes emerged for this line of questioning: (1) diversifying curriculum, (2) paying attention to the learning environment, and (3) educator responsibility and structural change.

Diversifying Curriculum

Both groups strongly emphasized that the curriculum needs to be diversified and D&I content should be infused organically into all the courses throughout the curriculum. According to Mia (S), “Every single

thing that has to be taught can be taught within diversity and inclusion itself. So, I think it is something that goes with educating in general.” Derek (S) agreed and said D&I should not be treated as an add-on topic. He explained that at his university a professor offers a special topics course on D&I; however, only those interested tend to take it. Some of the respondents in both groups also supported the value of stand-alone D&I courses along with diversification of curriculum. Beth (S) said special courses “that really dig into the topic” could be useful not just to public relations students but also to those in related majors.

Several students noted the importance of including diverse authors and having diverse practitioners come to speak in classes. According to Mia (S), “We love listening from different people that come from all over the country, all over the world even. That is so impactful.” Diverse practitioners, students emphasized, could effectively mentor underrepresented students and help them feel empowered. Almost all the faculty/educators also emphasized the importance of bringing diverse guest speakers into the classrooms so students can learn directly from them. A few of them also highly recommended study-abroad courses that help students understand cultural differences in embodied and fully immersed ways. Terrence (F/E) said, “I think students need to be pushed outside of their comfort zone. For them to understand difference, they have to see difference.” He also mentioned using role playing activities in classes to help students embody difference. Shana (F/E) added that “pushing your students and giving them new experiences and new ways to think about things and new people to talk with and communicate with is very important. . . . you need to challenge them.” Mimi (F/E) shared an example of how she does this:

I worked with a colleague at a university in another state and her student population is a less traditional population, and it has a more minority population than mine does. It was an online

course, and we made them work in groups together on a PR plan It was interesting just to see their reactions to it and just how different My students were like, “Well, we want to meet at midnight or whatever to talk about this.” And the students at the other school would say, “Well, I have to work. I’m taking this part-time,” and just trying to see how those differences work.

William (S) and Jasmine (S) added that organizing specific D&I workshops and industry tours would also be helpful.

Paying Attention to the Learning Environment

Along with curriculum, both groups emphasized the criticality of the learning environment for D&I to flourish (or perish). Ben (S) said teachers must “be mindful of everyone . . . and get students into the rhythm of constantly thinking about everyone and how everyone’s going to perceive something.” Sheena (S) said teachers should make sure they are being inclusive in the classroom and holding their students responsible when they are not. She added they can do this by “creating an environment of inclusiveness and feeling welcome. You know what I mean? . . . of belonging.” Jerry (F/E) said it is necessary to “embed cues into our [classroom] culture that indicate to people that they’re welcome.” He shared how he includes an inclusion statement in all his syllabi and talks about its importance in building an inclusive classroom environment. He said he has had great success with this, and many students have expressed their appreciation.

Terrence (F/E) emphasized educators must learn how to have difficult conversations about differences in classrooms. Several faculty/educators explained how they try to make their classrooms more inclusive and help students engage with difference in experiential and embodied ways. Sharif (S) emphasized this is especially important because students of color often feel like they do not belong and lack confidence in classrooms dominated by White students. Mimi (F/E) said she pays special

attention to see if someone is struggling or feeling isolated, and tries to find “someone who has a similar background that could be a mentor, or just someone who might understand some of the feelings that they might be feeling.” John (F/E) said students tend to gravitate towards their “own kind,” so he mixes them up in how they sit and team up for assignments.

As a minority-identifying educator, Terrence (F/E) said he attempts to serve as a role model for all, but especially for underrepresented students. Shana (F/E) emphasized self-reflexivity and the necessity for educators “to first examine our own biases, who we favor in our classrooms and who we favor as leaders.” Jasmine (S) said educators should humanize themselves and talk more about their own experiences and struggles with D&I. She added they should “not just lecture” but help students have more “diverse conversations.” According to Dave (S), an effective way for educators to address D&I is by “helping students see the disadvantages of not being diverse in our industry. Once they see that, then they can appreciate the positive.”

Educator Responsibility and Structural Change

Just like in the case of industry leaders, both groups brought up the responsibility factor for faculty/educators as they are leaders in the academic setting. Faculty/educators spoke more about it. Laura (F/E) explained as an educator it is her responsibility to do at least three things. First, she strives to educate students “on the core understandings, knowledge, and skillsets that they need to make an informed decision if they want to pursue a PR career.” Next, she teaches them to expect and face the challenges of working in a “primarily White workplace,” and third, she teaches them “how to advocate for themselves.” Marie (F/E) also said she teaches “her students how to be consultants and advocates for D&I thinking.” Sharif (S) said teachers should emphasize that D&I is “important not only for the bottom line but also for humanity and for understanding privilege and disparities between people from different

backgrounds and how D&I aims to make a more equal world.” On a hopeful note, Mimi (F/E) observed that the current generation is much more aware about D&I issues than previous ones, and this could mean progress in the near future.

John (F/E), who identifies as a White male educator, emphasized that in his experience, only faculty who identify as minorities tend to make a real effort to engage with D&I, and that this needs to change. Susan (F/E), who identifies as a White female educator, said it is every educator’s responsibility to widen the lens and help underrepresented students see the many values and applications of public relations. Gordon (F/E), who identifies as a Black male educator, also made this point. Faculty/educator respondents who have held or hold administrative roles stressed the need for major structural changes. They emphasized recruiting more diverse faculty and working with admissions/recruitment to better target diverse high school students. Terrence (F/E) recommended “intentionality, communication, thinking differently, thinking creatively, and going into places that are otherwise either ignored or not getting the same attention as other schools because they’re not as mainstream.” Susan (F/E) said programs doing a good job with D&I should be recognized widely and upheld as models for others to emulate. Finally, several faculty/educators said education and industry must work together more systematically to recruit and offer opportunities (e.g., internships, scholarships) in ways that promote D&I.

Discussion

This study spotlights the weak state of the school-to-industry D&I flow in public relations. It also points out the role and responsibility of leadership in bringing about change across the education-industry continuum. The findings support the literature reviewed to a large extent, highlight the current inadequate state of D&I in public relations pedagogy, and acknowledge the recent CPRE report’s concern that “practitioners

value job candidates who enter the workforce with a strong, multicultural professional lens, yet they do not see that perspective reflected among entry-level candidates to the extent they would like” (Mundy et al., 2018, p. 143). What this study adds is the important role of leadership across the education-industry continuum. Leadership engagement is crucial for D&I success. Students and faculty/educator D&I thought leaders are well positioned to catalyze the breakthroughs and wider engagement needed to make the D&I needle move faster and improve the school-to-industry D&I flow. Industry leaders need to step up and work with them on this bridging project.

We now return to the research questions posed earlier and offer some actionable suggestions that span the education-industry continuum. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

What are the views of current public relations student leaders and faculty/educators invested in D&I about the state of D&I in education and industry? How closely are they aligned with the recent definition of and suggestions regarding D&I forwarded by the CPRE?

The themes that emerged from our data clearly indicate both students and faculty/educators invested in D&I in public relations have a clear sense of the complexities, nuances, and challenges infusing the issue. Their views align with the CPRE’s comprehensive description of D&I. A majority of respondents emphasized the need to widen the definition of diversity and include more differences in addition to gender and race/ethnicity (i.e., secondary dimensions of difference one may not be born with, such as religion, marital status, and veteran status). Both groups understand that diversity and inclusion are not the same thing and that recruiting diverse employees does not automatically lead to inclusion. Inclusion to them is an attitude and culture wherein all, despite differences, are empowered and respected. In fact, both groups

emphasized the importance of inclusion, stating diversity simply cannot thrive without successful inclusion. Neither group was in favor of defining D&I too tightly because they believe the dimensions of D&I are dynamic and change with the times and with context. However, they believe some guidelines are needed for collective industry action.

Both groups also have an accurate picture of the current state of D&I in the industry. They believe while some improvement has occurred, much still needs to be done. They are well aware of predominant power differentials, the need for structural changes that support D&I, and that the industry does not reflect the diversity of the society in which it exists. They clearly see the link between D&I success and leadership support, and squarely put most of the responsibility for the current concerning situation on industry leaders, emphasizing D&I efforts must be genuine and authentic. It must be noted, though, that our study participants are academic leaders engaged in the D&I conversation who have taken it upon themselves to be well informed. However, this does not minimize the depth and value of their perceptions and views. In fact, as we will soon make the case, these leaders are valuable resources for improving the current situation in the education-industry continuum.

How do study participants view the role of industry leaders and educators in making D&I efforts successful?

As mentioned, both groups clearly see the importance of the support and genuine/personal engagement of senior leadership for D&I to be successful. They believe leaders need to lead on D&I by setting examples of behaviors and communication for others to emulate, being open to attitude and culture change, engaging in more intentional D&I work, exploring their own unconscious biases, and not being afraid to admit mistakes and learn from them. According to the students, leaders should humanize themselves, openly talk about their own struggles with D&I, be approachable, and communicate honestly about D&I

on an everyday basis. Students also emphasized that older and more homogenous leadership needs to move out of its comfort zone and be more open to new identities and newer ways of practicing the profession. Faculty/educators emphasized industry leaders need to organize better for D&I, lead the conversation, keep in mind the greater societal good, and hold themselves and each other accountable in genuine and measurable ways. Both groups agreed the economic imperative should not be privileged over the D&I moral imperative.

Both groups also emphasized the leadership role of faculty/educators in enhancing D&I in education. They outlined various ways in which curriculum and learning environments need to be revamped for D&I and emphasized the need to recruit more diverse faculty and students. It was underscored that learning environments should be more inclusive, and D&I must not be treated superficially and reduced to a commodity because this can prevent diverse students from feeling they can truly belong. These responses support what the literature review reports. Faculty/educators particularly pointed out that structural changes need to occur in higher education administration to improve recruitment and retention of both students and faculty. They also emphasized all educators, not just those who avow minoritized identities, must take responsibility for D&I in public relations pedagogy, teach all students (majority and minority) to be strong D&I advocates, and work with the industry to establish better school-to-industry D&I connections.

Actionable Suggestions

What do the overall findings suggest about actionable changes needed to improve the D&I dimensions of the school-to-industry flow? Our findings suggest public relations students and faculty/educators invested in D&I have an accurate and up-to-date grasp on the D&I situation, and that the education-industry continuum can benefit from their knowledge, skills, and abilities. In conclusion, we offer some suggestions

and strategies for improving the state of D&I across the education-industry continuum.

1. There is a need to organize D&I leadership forums and networks that connect students, faculty/educators, and industry leaders so they can work collectively and systematically to build creative programs and initiatives that enhance the conversation on D&I, develop focused exchanges between education and industry, and track the school-to-industry D&I flow. Such forums and networks should emphasize that D&I is every student's, educator's, and practitioner's responsibility, and not just of those who avow underrepresented identities. They should also emphasize the importance of inclusion for diversity to thrive, allyship and the need for authenticity and intentionality in D&I efforts.

2. Faculty/educator D&I thought leaders need to work collectively with peers and accreditation bodies to enhance curriculum for D&I and develop needed courses and content. Such efforts should also focus on assisting those educators who feel they need assistance with teaching through a D&I lens and building inclusive learning environments. This could be accomplished through workshops, webinars, training, special topics conferences, and overall systematic collaboration, dialogue, and information sharing.

3. Faculty/educator and student D&I thought leaders need to work consistently with administration, recruitment officers, and other relevant units on their campuses on developing strategies to step up recruitment and retention of diverse students and faculty. Because context is important, they should take stock of what the specific D&I needs and challenges of their campuses are.

4. Student D&I thought leaders need to work consistently with peers across the country (e.g., through PRSSA chapters) as D&I ambassadors to share knowledge and experiences, build dialogue, develop programming, and educate others about the importance of D&I

knowledge, abilities, and skills as entry-level qualifications necessary for success in industry. Educators and industry leaders must be personally engaged as guides and champions of such efforts.

The current weak school-to-industry D&I flow does not bode well for the future of the industry. Student and faculty/educator leaders committed to D&I success could be change agents in public relations pedagogy and serve as a strong bridge between education and industry.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is that it only focused on D&I leaders in the education setting. Other faculty and student voices should be included in future studies to gauge the differences between their views and those leading on D&I. This information would be useful for generating future changes. A broader study, for example a quantitative survey of students and faculty/educators who do not stand out as leaders when it comes to D&I, would enhance the findings of this study. Second, including leadership literature that links D&I success with engaged leadership could shed more light on the leadership dimensions of D&I in the public relations education-industry continuum. Future studies could focus on this aspect. Third, as one of our participants suggested, public relations education programs that are doing well with regards to D&I should be upheld as models for others to emulate. Studies that spotlight such programs and explore the reasons behind their success would be valuable additions to the literature.

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