

Public Relations Division Delphi Study

Abbreviated Report

Submitted to the Division July 5, 2013

The committee wishes to thank the Delphi Study participants for their commitment to this project.

It should be noted that the PRD leadership has already initiated some practices that address the issues identified in this study. There has been a concerted effort to expand the information about how the PRD works as well as opportunities within the division for presenting research and networking through expanded communications outlets.

It is our hope that as the PRD leadership changes over time that they will find this document useful in creating opportunities for the PRD members to help them find a home for their research and recognize the valuable networking opportunities within the division.

Respectfully submitted,

PRD Delphi Study Committee –

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Study Overview¹

The purpose of this study was to identify and prioritize areas for the Public Relations Division leadership to provide focus for the short-term and long-term future of the division. As the public relations discipline continues to grow, it is important identify priority areas and to address the needs of the division whose members support both the educational and professional development of future practitioners.

AEJMC's PRD is the largest organization of public relations educators in the world. Its 500+ members represent institutions of higher learning in the United States and about two-dozen countries around the world. Its members also serve as liaisons to other public relations organizations and activities in the arenas of higher education and professional practice.

According to the 2013 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, job opportunities for “public relations specialists is expected to grow 23 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment of public relations managers is expected to grow 16 percent from 2010 to 2020, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Growth of both will be driven by the need for organizations to maintain their public image in a high-information age and with the growth of social media.”

The growth in public relations is further reflected by the 1500 programs found within higher education offering undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees in public relations/communications or public relations coursework.

The Delphi Study method was selected for this study based on its use for consensus building qualities and the ease of data collection from individuals located across a widely dispersed geographical area. This study was undertaken during the 2012-2013 PRD leadership cycle. The 22 participants in this study represent a combination of past division heads, long-time PRD members, newer PRD members, occasional PRD members, graduate students and non-PRD members who have an interest in public relations or who are in a public relations degree-seeking program. The past heads and long time members were able to generate and evaluate content from institutional knowledge, while newer members, occasional members, and graduate students brought offered a different evaluative perspective to the content. Three non-members did not participate after the first round; they simply did not respond to the invitations. The 19 members that participated in all three rounds represent about approximately three percent of the total PRD membership.

The study consisted of four steps:

- 1) Pre-study discussion session to identify categories relevant to the PRD;
- 2) Round 1 - participants generated ideas for each of the previously identified categories;
- 3) Round 2 - responses from Round 1 were compiled and edited to reduce item redundancy. This document was then sent to participants who were asked to rank order their top five responses (items) within each category;
- 4) Round 3 - the Round 2 responses (items) were rank ordered within each category. Participants were then asked to rank order the categories.

¹ See Appendix II for the list of the participants).

The results recommended areas the PRD should focus on, and projects the PRD should undertake, that will benefit current and future members. The primary focus areas include improved communication related to the range of opportunities within the PRD, improved sessions, increased/maintained conference attendance, and increased funding to support division members.

Process

Pre-Study

To conduct this assessment, the Delphi Study method was selected to gain consensus among the PRD member study participants and some non-members who submit research to the PRD division but who have not joined the division. A preliminary discussion among several PRD members generated categories for the study participants to critique comment on. These topics included conference participation, conference structure in terms of research/teaching/PF&R sessions, participation in the PRD leadership and committees, mentoring, fundraising, and an open category (see Appendix I for the list of categories). Most of the questions and statements were presented as seeking information about opportunities and barriers within these categories.

Round 1

Initially, 30 PRD members and non-members were invited to participate in the study. Twenty-two of those invited agreed to participate. An email was sent to the 22 participants who were then directed to a Survey Monkey site to contribute their ideas to the categories outlined above. Reminder emails were sent over a period of several weeks. Respondents were asked to provide as many ideas as they wanted to in order to address the questions/statements.

Following the first round, the responses were evaluated in order to reduce duplication. (see Appendix II for the summary of responses). Three individuals conducted the review through several iterations in order to produce a comprehensive but tailored list of responses. There was a vast array of responses. For example, some respondents thought the PRD should limit research paper submissions to public relations-only topics, and others thought the research paper competition should seek papers where public relations was integrated with other topics.

A thorough and extensive review of the responses resulted in compiling a list of topics within each category. The responses to the ‘opportunities’ and ‘barriers’ under the topic headings were collapsed together as the content was often duplicated. This required breaking some responses up into separate statements. However, once an idea was represented, it was not repeated even if several respondents had basically made the same recommendation. This resulted in a 25-page document comprised of category headings and responses.

Round 2

The 25-page document was sent to the study participants via email as an attachment so they could review the document before ranking their choices via Survey Monkey in this round. The responses were not rank ordered to indicate which responses had occurred the most often in the previous round. Participants were asked to read the document and to rank the statements in terms of what ideas were the most important to assure the PRD is a quality resource to its membership. Most of the question/statements from the first round had over 20 responses even after eliminating redundancies. Participants were asked to rank the 5 statements under each category they felt represented what was the most important to the PRD, where 1 = most important and 5 = least important. Reminder emails were sent over a period of several weeks to participants who had not responded. Based on frequency and mean scores, a shorter instrument was developed for Round 3 (please see Appendix III).

Round 3

An email was sent to all of the participants (even those who had not participated in round 2) with an attachment of the result summary from round 2. Participants were then asked to rank which three categories within the eight available categories they felt the PRD leadership should pursue moving forward, where 1 = most important and 3 equaled least important. Reminder emails were sent over the next several weeks (see Appendix IV for the results).

Results and Recommendations

This study was carried out over a period of seven months. Results often overlap between one topic and another (e.g., increased communication and increased fundraising to support member participation). The rank order of the categories participants' recommended the PRD leadership focus on are:

1. Improve research paper and poster sessions.
2. Increase/maintain conference participation.
3. Improve communication and networking.
4. Expand PRD publishing opportunities.
5. Increase graduate student participation.
6. PRD fundraising.
7. Improve PF&R sessions
8. Other

Improve research paper and poster sessions

This topic touched on several areas. Foremost, the participants recommended better judging guidelines. Over the past few years, the research paper chairs have implemented some measures that should help. For instance, each paper, when possible, is judged by an individual

who has expressed an interest in the topic and each paper is judged by a full, associate and assistant professor, and occasionally a graduate student, in order to provide feedback that is neither too lenient nor punitive. Additionally, an author of a previous top paper posted their paper and a modified 'less good' version of the same paper and an explanation about what made one better than the other (<http://www.aejmc.net/PR/conventions.html>) to provide some guidance to new reviewers.

A secondary point under this topic was to increase the number of reviewers. The research chairs typically have just enough reviewers and they are the same pool from year to year representing about 25 percent of the division's membership. While a member cannot review in the same category as they submit, they can review in other categories. For example, if someone submits a paper in the open research paper category, they can review in the teaching or student paper category.

A third point under this topic was to increase the number of research paper sessions. This is beyond PRD's control. AEJMC allocates the number of sessions each division or interest group gets and everyone gets the same number regardless of the number of members in the division. Additionally, a division cannot hold two sessions at the same time. As it stands now, the PRD uses most of the available session times. The PRD is more successful in some years than others in obtaining sessions, but AEJMC expects divisions to maintain about a 50% acceptance rate of research papers across all categories.

A final point was that the PRD should make the AEJMC conference top-of-mind for potential participants. One of the primary concerns here is that the NCA moved their research paper submission deadline leading to the potential for researchers to submit their work to that organization instead.

Recommendation – Increase frequency of notifications and employ all communication channels (website, listserv, social media sites, newsletter) regarding research paper submission opportunities, awards, submission parameters, call for reviewers and availability of reviewing guidelines.

Increase/Maintain conference attendance

In terms of the research programming, the study participants recommend using sponsored research topics that change from year to year and accepting more qualitative studies and case studies, which tend to receive lower scores from reviewers.

There is also the recommendation to increase opportunities for networking. Respondents noted that due to pace that the PRD has sessions, there is not much time outside of the schedule to network.

Again there is a call for better communication about the conference. In general, the PRD has increased its communication outreach by incorporating the use of several SM tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. The newsletter this past year has been expanded to include interviews with practicing professionals and focusing on individuals within the division, including graduate students.

Finally, there is a perceived need to increase funding so that graduate students can participate.

Recommendation – The feedback under this topic provided some areas to explore such as pilot testing a sponsored research topic for a dedicated research session. Continued communication about PRD opportunities, awards, and networking activities should address some of the perception issues. Fundraising specific to graduate student travel is available from AEJMC so better communication about this opportunity will be implemented (<http://www.personal.psu.edu/mch208/blogs/comm-graduate/2011/03/aejmc-offers-travel-grants-to-annual-conference.html>).

Improve communications and networking

Respondents recommended a ‘Quick-Start Guide’ for new and potential members. Another recommendation was for the PRD to communicate more clearly about graduate student presentation opportunities. The third area was to expand mentorship opportunities and finally, expand graduate student specific events.

Recommendation – The PRD leadership will form a small group to develop the “Quick-Start Guide” which will be posted on the website, sent out through the listserv and highlighted in a future newsletter. SM content will also be developed and posted. The onus here is really on the faculty members who oversee the students to direct them to the guide and the call for research papers.

The leadership can cull the graduate student names from the roster each year and send the information to them with the hope that they will use it and share it. The graduate student presentation opportunities can be included in the guide (along with the awards) and the opportunities can be highlighted in the newsletter. Finally, the division is making progress with the recently re-launched mentorship program and should continue efforts to make this a successful program.

Expand PRD publishing opportunities

The first recommendation was to have the leadership explore expedited reviews for top papers. These papers already receive expedited reviews by the *Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Teaching Public Relations Monographs*. Another recommendation is to have a conference session on publishing. Additional recommendations included starting a journal, including a case studies in journals, and collaborating with another division to start a journal.

Recommendation – The number of journals related to the public relations discipline has not grown in proportion to the growth in industry or higher education programs. The leadership should develop a committee to explore the type of content a new journal should cover. Following this, the leadership should initiate conversations with publishers about opportunities.

The division is due for a session on best practices for publishing – it is always well attended. Additionally, the leadership could produce a list of journals for the membership that

highlights topical areas that may relate to the public relations research they are undertaking in order to expand their publishing options.

Increase graduate student participation

The preliminary recommendations included fundraising for travel, mentoring opportunities, PF&R sessions dedicated to graduate student issues, and the development of a Quick-Start Guide.

Recommendation – The leadership already plans to develop a Quick-Start Guide for new and potential members. Additionally, the leadership does co-sponsor PF&R sessions with the Graduate Student IG. A pre-conference session may provide another opportunity. The mentoring program is currently rebuilding and communication about this opportunity can be expanded. Fundraising specific to graduate student travel is available from AEJMC and better communication about this opportunity will be implemented.

PRD fundraising

There was an expressed need to create a source for needs-based funding for anyone who needs the conference support help, and in light of the reduction in professional development budgets, this is a valid point. Additional areas identified include journal development, professional development, and a speaker's fund. The Roschwalb award was also mentioned under this category but not the Kaiser award. The Roschwalb is currently being funded on a five-year cycle by the Page Center.

Recommendation – There is a fundraising committee who can be tasked with requesting funds from the membership and from outside sources to build a pool of funds for needs-based candidates. Once established, a committee would need to assess and rank applicants. The leadership suggests starting small and also communicating about roommate matching, when airlines have a sales, etc., and send this information out to the membership through the listserv.

AEJMC supports graduate student travel with grants. Information about this source of funding should be sent out in April via the listserv and SM sites. Graduate students should utilize this funding source first.

A separate fund could be established for professional development and/or a speaker's fund that could be operationalized through a PF&R session, or pre-conference session.

Funding a journal should follow discussions within the leadership as to the type of journal will best benefit its members. Recommendations included an on-line journal and a case study focused journal. More research needs to be done before a publisher is approached. Two or more members of the PRD should be tasked with exploring publishing options over the next year.

The PRD has made a commitment to support the Kaiser Award. The leadership is working with the Kaiser committee to identify some corporations or organizations that can be approached to provide multi-year funding for this award. This model, used for the Roschwalb award, is likely the best option as endowing the Kaiser award through AEJMC requires over \$50,000

Improve PF&R sessions

In a nutshell, communicate better about what PF&R is. We are not the only division with this PF&R identity confusion. Recommendations also included providing examples of a good PF&R panel submission, pursue partnerships with other divisions for PF&R and provide one research methods PF&R session each conference.

Recommendation – The leadership has made an effort to communicate better about what PF&R is. There was an article in Fall 2012 newsletter under the PRD 101 topic for the month (http://www.aejmc.net/PR/newsletter/newsletter_2012_november.pdf). This information could be included in the “Quick-Start Guide” and also included on the website elsewhere such as in a FAQ section. Samples of successful PF&R submissions that included explanations about why these were successful submissions should be posted on the website.

The PRD does share PF&R programming with other divisions in order to get the biggest bang for our buck but perhaps this can be communicated better. Also, our pre-conference sessions tend to have a focus on teaching or PF&R, or some combination, and that information can be highlighted. The leadership recommends adopting a research methods PF&R session every 2nd or 3rd year to start in 2014.

Other

The recommendations that bubbled to the top in this category include making the PRD the preferred outlet for submitting conference papers, better collaboration with other groups and increased interactive dialog throughout the year.

Recommendation- Expanding the use of the PRD’s communication’s outlets and adhering to a schedule of timely announcements should help with the keeping the PRD front and center in terms of opportunities to submit papers. The SM committee has a schedule and rubrics for posting information and assessing impact. Also, because many PRD members are also members of other organizations such as IPPRC, NCA, ICA, and PRSA, exploratory conversations can take place and information about opportunities provided by these organizations can be shared which will help with the interactive dialog. Additionally, information about regional conferences and taped professional development sessions could be posted to PRD communication channels.

APPENDIX I – ROUND 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What do you think are the key OPPORTUNITIES for maintaining/increasing PRD/AEJMC conference participation? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
2. What do you think are the key BARRIERS to PRD/AEJMC conference participation? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
3. What do you think are the key OPPORTUNITIES for recruiting graduate student participation within the PRD? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
4. What do you think are the BARRIERS to graduate student participation within the PRD? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
5. What do you think are the key OPPORTUNITIES for maintaining/increasing high quality PF&R and teaching panel submissions? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
6. What do you think are the key BARRIERS to maintaining/increasing high quality PF&R and teaching panel submissions? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
7. What do you think are the key OPPORTUNITIES for maintaining/increasing high quality research paper submissions? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
8. What do you think are the key BARRIERS to maintaining/increasing high quality research paper submissions? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
9. What do you think are the key OPPORTUNITIES for the members of the PRD to mentor graduate students and junior faculty? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
10. What do you think are the key BARRIERS for the members of the PRD to mentor graduate students and junior faculty? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestions.
11. What do you think the PRD should be fundraising for?
12. Do you have suggestions for improving how the PRD communicates with its members/potential members about PRD activities and opportunities?
13. What are your suggestions for increasing the potential to publish within the Public Relations Division or in collaboration with other publishing sources? Please list your ideas and include a brief explanation to clarify your suggestion.
14. Are there additional topics we should consider? Please feel free to include topics you feel we should explore during this study:
15. Your name - I will use this to reconcile your participation and send a gentle reminder if needed. Your responses throughout the process will remain anonymous.

APPENDIX II - STUDY PARTICIPANTS

1. Giselle Auger – Duquesne University
2. Denise Bortree – Penn State University
3. Colleen Connolly-Ahern – Penn State University
4. Melanie Formentin – Penn State University
5. Susan Gonders – Southeast Missouri State University
6. Susan Grantham – University of Hartford
7. Nancy Kerr – Champlain College
8. Carolyn Kim – Biola University
9. Marjorie Kruvand – Loyola University
10. Chuck Lubbers – University of South Dakota
11. Teresa Mastin – DePaul University
12. Brooke McKeever – University of South Carolina
13. Ken Plowman – Brigham Young University
14. Geah Pressgrove – University of South Carolina
15. David Remund – Drake University
16. Bey-Ling Sha – San Diego State University
17. Brian Smith – Purdue University
18. Sean Stewart – VCU
19. Don W. Stacks – University of Miami
20. Natalie Tindall – Georgia State University
21. Judy VanSlyke Turk - VCU
22. Richard D. Waters – University of San Francisco