



Teaching Public Relations

Published by the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Edited by Professor Todd Hunt, Rutgers University

No. 37, June 1994

Bringing Professionals into the Classroom: 'Faculty for a Day'

**Suzanne Heck, APR,
Central Missouri State University**

(Editor's note: There are numerous appendices that are referred to in this article. Copies of the appendices can be obtained from the author.)

Introduction

"Faculty for a Day" was a special event that brought business communication professionals into the classrooms of the Department of Communication at Central Missouri State University to teach for a day. The event, organized and conducted by public relations majors in a publicity course, included coordinating professionals with instructors to teach their classes, preparing a luncheon and noon program, organizing mock-job interview sessions between professionals and graduating seniors, and planning a department reception where students displayed portfolios, showed video promotions, and offered clips of their work.

The purpose of the event was four fold:

- 1) it taught public relations students how to apply knowledge learned from their coursework into a real world setting while at the same time teaching writing and desk-top publishing skills;
- 2) it actively utilized the department's Professional Advisory Council (PAC);
- 3) it showcased department of communication majors, facilities and programs to outside business and university publics in an effort to promote the department and its public relations program; and
- 4) it helped enhance the image of university teaching.

The event was patterned after a public relations case called "I've Been Back to School" outlined in Jerry Hendrix's *Public Relations Cases* (1988)(1). Produced by the Ohio Education Association and ELK Promotions in 1981, the Ohio project was designed to enhance the public perception of teachers by inviting community opinion leaders to return to school for a day to teach classes in Columbus. Although "Faculty for a Day" utilized many of the tools and techniques found in the "I've Been Back to School" case, its emphasis was not solely to enhance the perception of teaching but rather to provide a special event that would teach public relations students the benefits of learning from the case-study approach and how to conduct an on-hands special event.

The event also solved the problem of how to effectively integrate the Professional Advisory Council which is comprised of Kansas City business communication professionals with the students. The PAC meets with the Department of Communication on campus each semester. Previous student sessions with the professionals had regrettably generated little student response; so, drawing the PAC members into the classroom seemed a useful way of exposing students to the expertise of the professionals and of promoting greater student awareness of the council.

Overview of Event

PAC members were paired with instructors in similar fields and became instructors for a day while regular faculty acted as host-teachers (Appendix 1). Each professional was prepared beforehand through a letter from his or her host-teacher to arrive in class with a lesson plan and a course focus. (Appendix 2(2)). During the class each PAC member took roll and was responsible for the lecture. In between classes, faculty, students, and professionals either visited in a designated commons area or PAC members held office hours doing routine duties with their host-teacher.

At noon a luncheon was held in the department's television studios where a banquet was catered by the University's Marriott Food Hosts. During the luncheon publicity students put on a program that included a slide presentation, which honored department faculty, and an awards ceremony, which thanked PAC members for participating in the day's events. University administrators were also invited to the luncheon and program. Many attended including the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Associate Provost, and the Directors of Marketing and Public Relations. A display of student works and departmental achievements were also set up in an adjacent TV studio where participants could browse through student portfolios, copies of the student-run newspaper, and awards and honors department majors and faculty had recently earned.

After lunch student organizational meetings were held in nearby classrooms. Professionals from the various disciplines such as broadcasting and film, public relations, speech communication, and journalism attended each discipline's organizational meeting and acted as interviewers for pre-selected graduating seniors in a mock job interview session. Each meeting was organized by committee members of the publicity class in an effort to showcase each organization's goals and objectives as a means of informing PAC members and potential student members about each organization's purpose(See Appendix 10(3)).

Concluding the day, a reception was held in the department's television studios. Everyone participating in the day's activities, as well as all other communication majors, were invited to attend the hor d'oeuvres reception which allowed students, professionals, faculty, administrators, and staff to exchange impressions of the day. During the reception, broadcasting majors showed videos of their work on three video monitors that hung from the ceiling throughout the studio. As a special conclusion to the event, a special news story was aired by broadcasting majors who had covered the day's event. Additionally, the event generated some actual news coverage by various University media outlets(see Appendix 3(4)).

Course Planning

Because the publicity course is an upper-level writing course for public relations majors at Central, the course emphasis was on learning writing techniques for public relations. In addition, students were taught desk-top publishing skills by creating publicity materials in the Macintosh laboratory where the course was taught. Congruently students also learned how to plan and conduct a special event and how to adapt tools and techniques learned from a public relations case (See course syllabus in Appendix 4).

"Faculty for a Day" was held toward the end of the semester so that student's could learn how to write

and design the appropriate publicity items and to work in groups in organizing and completing their assignments. During the first eight weeks of the course students were taught a word processing program (Microsoft 3.0) where students wrote business letters to PAC members and faculty soliciting resumes to produce profiles for lesson plan kits and for later use by the Department of Communication (See Appendix 5(5)). These profiles proved useful later as data for departmental publications (i.e. department newsletter) and for introductory summaries of PAC members when they revisited classes or conducted workshops on campus. Students also wrote news releases and public service announcements. A contest was held between class members to select the best ones for use by Central's Office of Public Relations (See Appendix 6). Students were also responsible for creating itinerary sheets for the lesson plan kits the faculty hosts were to use and writing letters to participants as reminders of their obligations to the day's activities (See Appendix 7(6)) .

The last eight weeks students were taught a desktop publishing program (PageMaker 3.0) to create invitations, name tags, award certificates, programs for the luncheon, and fliers announcing the event (See Appendix 8). The class was divided into five committees including registration, media, meetings, faculty, and luncheon/reception, each being responsible for various portions of the special event.

The registration committee was responsible for creating name tags and lesson plan kits that included the daily itinerary for each faculty and PAC member who were matched; profiles of each; a fact sheet about the day's events (See Appendix 9); a CMSU campus map; chalk, paper, and pencil. The day of the event, students on the registration committee greeted PAC members and escorted them to faculty offices. They also acted as hosts in the commons area during the morning. This honed their oral presentational skills and gave them valuable time to visit with PAC members.

The luncheon/reception committee was responsible for the noon program and afternoon reception. Its members worked with the University Media Center in developing welcome banners and a slide presentation honoring department faculty. The committee was also responsible for setting up the student exhibits where student portfolios and awards were displayed. Students designed place settings and favors for each participant at the lunch (using an apple/teacher theme) and they also served as hosts during the luncheon and afternoon reception. Students also coordinated activities with Marriott Food Hosts and University Facilities personnel, which gave them real-world experiences in planning a special event.

The meetings committee was in charge of coordinating the organizational meetings after the luncheon. Students reserved classrooms with the University Facilities Coordinator and notified organizational advisors and officers through business letters about the special meetings (Appendix 10). In addition, PAC members were notified through correspondence to come prepared with job-interview questions to ask student interviewees. Members of the meeting committee also escorted participants to adjacent rooms following the luncheon and acted as hosts during the meetings. The media committee was responsible for generating publicity for the event (Appendix 11). Members compiled a media list of regional broadcast and newspaper channels, wrote a feature article for the campus newspaper, and selected the winner of the best news release and PSA from the publicity class. They worked with broadcast students on the news story, which was shown at the reception and secured still photographers for the day's events. They alerted media by telephone earlier in the week of the special event and coordinated media contacts with the University Office of Public Relations which disseminated news releases about the event. The University television station, KMOS, and the campus newspaper, The Muleskinner, covered the event.

The faculty committee was in charge of keeping the department faculty coordinated during the event. Reminder memos were sent beforehand to ask faculty to contact their assigned PAC member about lesson plans for the day (Appendix 2). Information was also sent to those faculty who did not participate as host-teachers to keep them apprised of the event and to ensure that they felt welcome at the luncheon and reception.

Conclusion

In evaluating the event, students said that they had truly enjoyed working on a special event that actually took place, and that they were proud of the work they had accomplished. They became aware of the role special events play in fostering positive relations between various publics and how important detailed planning is in conducting an event. Other faculty and university administrators also offered positive feedback about the day (Appendix 12). The event also seemed to spark a renewed camaraderie among programs within the Department of Communication. It also allowed faculty and students to meet together in one place in a relaxed atmosphere for conversation and fun. The department was also able to showcase its facilities, faculty, students, programs, and its relationship with the Professional Advisory Council to the university community.

Students also received excellent writing experiences. They produced profiles, business letters, news releases, PSAs, feature stories, and itineraries, while learning the Macintosh computer system at the same time. In addition, they were taught desk-top publishing skills by creating programs, promotional fliers, name tags, and other publicity items on state-of-the-art equipment that may make them more competitive in the job market. "Faculty for a Day" also provided a perfect outlet for PAC members to get actively involved with students, administrators, and faculty on both an interpersonal and professional level. They were able to offer their individual communication expertise and to get a taste of what it is like to be a university teacher. Students and faculty both appeared to enjoy meeting these professionals and seemed to welcome the change of a routine school day.

Dennis Wilcox (1988), coordinator of the public relations degree program at San Jose State University and an advocate of advisory boards, suggested that "advisory board members want to be involved and utilized-they do not want to be just window dressing on a letterhead or a brochure." He argued that advisory board meetings must have substance and action items in order for board members to attend, but at the same time the members should not be burdened with multiple committees and "busy work." Another public relations educator, Carol Ohl (1991), has also reinforced the positive uses of advisory boards. She argued that "professional practitioners make great guest speakers" and that bringing professionals to campus can be a boon for both the practitioner and university.⁽⁸⁾ "Faculty for a Day" provided an avenue for this type of activity by bringing the students, faculty, and the professionals together.

PAC members also praised the event. Stuart Smith, APR, account supervisor for Boasberg Valentine Radford in Kansas City, said the event gave him the opportunity to get back in the shoes of a college student and to see first hand the frustrations they have while looking for a job. Jim McDowell, director of marketing properties at Hallmark Cards in Kansas City said, "If more businesses realized what happens on a college campus, there would be more support from the business community, not only financially but professionally."⁽⁹⁾

The main flaw the class members found in evaluating the campaign was that outside media should have been better cultivated. Because several of the PAC members were executives of television and radio stations or newspaper organizations in the Kansas City area, the class believed these professionals should have been asked for coverage. Although the Kansas City media were contacted about covering the event, it was believed the news peg should have been to highlight the PAC members as "special guests" of the university, instead of focusing on the special event itself as the main news emphasis. The class also believed that communication majors who were not directly involved with student organizations or classes held that day should have been more heavily recruited to attend the event. However, the turnout for the reception at the end of the day was excellent. Nearly 300 people attended.

Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, argued in his

report Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate (1991) that there needs to be more recognition given to teaching, and that the work of the professoriate needs to be related more to the world outside the campus as a means of promoting the integration of knowledge.(10) Clearly the "Faculty for a Day" event addressed these needs. It promoted teaching while at the same time allowed for the sharing of knowledge between both the business and academic communities. Better yet, it was orchestrated through a course project that was developed and implemented by students.

End Notes

1. Hendrix, Jerry, Public Relations Cases (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1988) 204 208.
- 2 Curtis, Dan B., letter to James R. McDowell, 31 Jan. 1991.
- 3 Brower, Dana, letter to Suzi Heck and Kristi Bradshaw, 22 Feb. 1991.
- 4 Weixeldorfer, Janet, "'Faculty for a Day' is a Hit with Students", The Muleskinner, 11 Apr. 1991: 14 and Kelchner, Dana, "Area Professionals Come Back to Class for 'Faculty for a Day,'" commlink, spg 1991: 3.
- 5 Sprowls, Beverly, letter to Ralph Bardgett, 7 Feb. 1991 and backgrounder on Charlotte English.
- 6 Reser, Brian, letter to Daniel Curds, 26 Mar. 1991.
- 7 Wilcox, Dennis, Professional Advisory Boards (San Jose: San Jose St. Univ. Dept of Mass Comm, 1988) 2.
- 8 Ohl, Carol, "Networking Through Professional Organizations," Learning to Teach: What You Need to Know to Develop a Successful Career as a Public Relations Educator, Ed. Judy VanSlyke Turk. 240. New York: Educators Section, Public Relations Society of America, 1991.
- 9 Kelchner, commlink, 3.
- 10 Boyer's remarks are found in Larissa Grunig's "Academic Professional Development: Teaching as a Process," Learning to Teach: What You Need to Know to Develop a Successful Career as a Public Relations Educator, Ed. Judy VanSlyke Turk. 20. New York: Educators Section, Public Relations Society of America, 1991/

[Return to [PRD Home Page](#)] [Return to [Teaching Public Relations](#)]

Last updated March 1997..