

Developing a New Generation of Public Relations Leaders: Best Practices of Public Relations Undergraduate Programs

Michele E. Ewing, Kent State University
David L. Remund¹, Drake University
Lauren Dargay, Kent State University

Abstract

This qualitative study explored best practices for leadership development within U.S. accredited and/or certified undergraduate public relations programs. Researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis of website content regarding leadership development for 110 undergraduate programs offering a public relations major, which are accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and/or hold Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The second phase of the study involved semi-structured interviews ($n = 19$) with program directors and educators identified through website analysis as having the most information about fostering leadership development; additional programs were included in the sample, based on interviewees' recommendations. The results suggested four components for undergraduate public relations programs to help develop the next generation of leaders.

Keywords: public relations, leadership, leadership development, public relations education, public relations curriculum

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¹This co-author was affiliated with the University of Oregon when the study's data was collected.

Scholars have already established that leadership is essential to effective public relations practice (Berger & Meng, 2010; Meng, Berger, Gower, & Heyman, 2012). Subsequently, the Commission on Public Relations Education (2015) advocated for better integration of leadership development in public relations education. Further, this need to develop future communication leaders was conveyed in the largest global study of public relations leadership to date (Berger & Meng, 2014).

How to best go about developing the public relations leaders of tomorrow, however, remains a difficult question to answer. Researchers have looked at the degree to which educators integrate leadership development within existing public relations courses (Erzikova & Berger, 2012); how perceptions of leadership differ between college students and established practitioners (Meng, 2013); and even the specific competencies that aspiring public relations leaders need (Jin, 2010). A study among U.S. students, young professionals, and senior professionals supported the need for undergraduate curricula to include courses with leadership/management principles (Remund & Ewing, 2015). Further, this study indicates that young people in public relations want to step into leadership responsibilities to gradually acclimate to the demands.

This qualitative study builds upon existing scholarly knowledge while filling a gap. The study was designed to identify and analyze best practices for leadership development within undergraduate public relations programs in the United States.

Literature Review

Leadership development has gained traction as an issue in public relations practice and as a focus for scholarly research. The Plank Center for Leadership's global study emphasized the need for leadership development to be better integrated in educational curricula (Berger & Meng, 2014). However, while researchers have acknowledged the growing importance of developing leaders within the public relations profession,

the scholarly examination of best practices for leadership development is comparatively thin, particularly as it relates to how such practices actually come to life in undergraduate education.

To better emphasize leadership development and improve public relations curriculum, Berger and Meng (2010) recommended educators must first determine how leadership is taught in undergraduate courses and to what extent it is taught and incorporated into existing courses. They need to pinpoint where the gaps in education exist, and find effective ways to teach leadership to students. This study begins to help answer these important questions.

Leadership in Public Relations

Prior studies have explored how public relations roles are defined, how the communication function is structured within corporations and other organizations, and the competencies and cognitive qualities that communication leaders must possess in order to be effective (Algren & Eichhorn, 2006; Berger, 2005, 2009; DeSanto & Moss 2004; Dozier & Broom, 2006; Lee & Evatt, 2005). Additionally, J. Choi and Y. Choi (2009) identified seven dimensions of public relations leadership. They determined that leadership in public relations includes “upward influence, coordinating, internal monitoring, networking, representing, providing vision, and acting as a change agent” (p. 292). These aspects indicate that leadership in public relations is multidimensional and involves a variety of skills (Choi & Choi, 2009).

Still, the concept of leadership is difficult to define (Gaddis & Foster, 2015). A variety of attributes are involved in leading and leadership roles, and some individuals may consider certain aspects of leadership to be more important or valuable than others. Additionally, previous research suggests that public relations professionals consider leadership in their field to be different from leadership in other fields (Berger & Meng, 2010). Therefore, Berger and Meng (2010) developed a definition

of leadership in public relations as “a dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produce ethical and effective communication practice” (Berger & Meng, 2010, p. 427; see also Meng et al., 2012, p. 24). This definition takes into account that leadership is an ever-evolving process that consists of skills, characteristics, values, and actions. Berger (2012) asked participants in his study to rank 12 leadership-development approaches according to importance. The highest-rated leadership-development approach was “strengthen change management capabilities,” followed by “improve the listening skills of professionals” and “enhance conflict management skills” (Berger, 2012, p. 18).

The Need for Expertise in Leadership

In public relations, good leadership has the potential to strengthen the entire field and to increase organizational effectiveness (Petersone & Erzikova, 2016). Additionally, good leadership benefits both organizations and employees. Meng (2014) found that “organizational culture generates a direct, positive effect on the achievement of excellent leadership in public relations. More importantly, excellent leadership in public relations also influences organizational culture by reshaping it in a favorable way to support public relations efforts in the organization” (p. 363). Developing communication leaders who can navigate issues and respond effectively is critical, as organizations become more dynamic and change rapidly (Meng, 2015).

Gender may play an important role. Women have dominated the public relations field during the past two decades and female enrollment in many undergraduate public relations programs has exceeded 80% (Daughtery, 2014). However, some scholars argued that feminization of the public relations field has resulted in lower pay (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001), less power (O’Neil, 2003) and slower advancement to leadership (Grunig et. al, 2001). In turn, a 2012 study

indicated that manager role enactment and participation in management decision-making were among the factors contributing to the pay inequity between male and female public relations professionals (Dozier, Sha, & Shen, 2013).

Gender poses unique challenges at work, making leadership development particularly vital for women. It is essential that public relations students, young professionals, and experienced practitioners be trained in leadership skills and informed about best practices to develop strong leadership. A nationwide study involving interviews with senior public relations practitioners, recent graduates, and students nationwide showed young professionals and students want to be mentored and have actual leadership responsibilities, need to take risks without the fear of failure, and know that hard work is important (Remund & Ewing, 2015). This interest in leadership among young public relations professionals and students, as well as the need to focus on leadership development, provides an opportunity to break down barriers for future female leaders.

Although the demand for strong leaders in public relations is high, leadership training is inconsistent. Berger (2015) concluded that “a lack of leadership development programs,” and “incredibly high expectations for future leaders in the field” exist (p. 50). Consequently, teaching and mentoring students and professionals how to be good leaders is essential in helping them succeed in the field. The literature documents limited leadership-specific development and training for students and professionals, but not much is being done to address this problem. Based on the Plank Center for Leadership’s study among public relations professionals in 10 countries, Berger (2015) concluded that there is no sense of urgency to address the need for leadership development programs within companies or schools. Meng (2015) noted, “Although the profession has advocated for leveraging the roles of public relations to a managerial and strategic level, the actual effort in building up the pipeline

of future leaders in the profession is delayed” (p. 31).

Best Practices for Developing a New Generation of Leaders

While the literature has conveyed the need for leadership expertise in public relations, limited research focused on best practices for developing the next generation of public relations leaders has been conducted. Earlier research suggests that university programs need to focus specifically on leadership skills. Bronstein and Fitzpatrick (2015) stated, “To truly groom a generation of leaders for the future will require intentional leadership training” (p. 77). Some scholars argue that leadership training should occur both in and outside of the classroom. Shin, Heath, and Lee (2011) explain that contact with professionals and professional organizations will prepare students to become public relations leaders. A study conducted by Erzikova and Berger (2012) indicates that PR educators advocated “a holistic approach to teaching that includes more specialized leadership content, greater access to PR leaders and role models, and increased opportunities for related experiences outside of the classroom” (p. 3).

Integrating leadership development into curriculum. Some scholars contend that students learn about leadership as they progress through the program (Berger, 2015). However, many scholars believe students need more leadership-specific training and education. Bronstein and Fitzpatrick (2015) argued that undergraduate public relations programs do not focus enough on leadership. “In higher education, there is a remarkable scarcity in designing, integrating, and delivering leadership in public relations teaching and education” (Meng, 2015, p. 31), which has a negative impact on future generations of leaders. The lack of curricular integration of leadership development slows the development of future public relations leaders (Meng, 2015). Even when leadership development is integrated, concerns linger about how to teach it. Several researchers argue the curriculum requires a better balance of abstract concepts and

real-world experience (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011). These authors noted, "Our challenge is to ensure that our curricula not only provide abstract concepts and frameworks but are also grounded in the real problems that our students will have to navigate" (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011, p. 468). Leadership is an abstract concept that requires contextualization and application to take meaningful root with students.

Scholars have made recommendations for how to integrate leadership development into curriculum in public relations programs. After comparing public relations students' and professionals' perceptions of leadership skills, leadership in public relations, and leadership development, Meng (2013) suggested six ways to incorporate the findings of her study into education: use the findings as a training checklist to discuss how to apply leadership principles in real-world situations; as an assessment tool administered before or after a public relations course; as the basis for a research project or a role play assignment involving strategic planning, an ethics scenario, or a crisis; and as a platform for discussions about issues in leadership or as assessment metrics to help students monitor and revise their ideas about leadership through internships or group projects.

Bronstein and Fitzpatrick (2015) argued formal leadership training in the curriculum would prepare students to become thought leaders, corporate leaders, and team leaders. They determined that students need a "leadership mindset, or a purposefully cultivated understanding of oneself as capable of exercising leadership in daily contexts" (Bronstein & Fitzpatrick, 2015, p. 78). Cooley, Walton, and Conrad (2014) explained that students need more exposure to leadership theory in their courses. They concluded, "PR professors do an adequate job of teaching students good management skills, but, generally speaking, the PR curricula needs more focus on theoretical understanding, development, and application" (Cooley et al., 2014, p. 444). Educators advocated that case studies, group

discussions, and student-led projects are the most effective approaches to teach leadership content and concepts (Erzikova & Berger, 2012).

One challenge to integrating leadership development into the curriculum, though, is that schools focus on skills needed in first jobs rather than leadership skills (Bronstein & Fitzpatrick, 2015). According to Cooley et al. (2014), students must be prepared for their first jobs; consequently, skills training should take precedence. Practical skills and knowledge are necessary for students to be hired, so more focus is placed on those rather than on leadership skills. Further, a lack of leadership training and teaching experience among educators may create obstacles for leadership education (Erzikova & Berger, 2012).

As the literature review reveals, existing research on public relations education generally suggests that not enough is being done to address leadership development within undergraduate education, and there are mixed recommendations about how to hone leadership among public relations students. To that end, the first research question is:

RQ1: What are U.S. undergraduate public relations programs doing in the realm of leadership development?

Developing leadership skills outside of the classroom. Students can develop leadership skills through means other than coursework. Aside from more specialized leadership content in classes, educators say that more access to public relations leaders, mentors, and role models, as well as more opportunities for experiences outside of the classroom, will improve leadership development (Erzikova & Berger, 2012). Benjamin and O'Reilly (2011) determined that leadership should be taught through building procedural and declarative knowledge in a course, as well as through hands-on opportunities in which students can apply that knowledge. Mentorships and interactivity between students and professionals can also be beneficial in leadership development. Contact between students and professional public relations associations may help

better prepare future leaders, as well as educate them on how leadership is viewed around the world (Shin et al., 2011). Finally, leadership skills can be developed and improved through extracurricular activities and involvement outside of the classroom. Haber, Allen, Facca, and Shankman (2012) found that individuals involved in student organizations self-reported higher emotionally intelligent leadership behaviors than students who were not involved, which suggests that the more involved an individual is in student organizations, the more that individual will practice emotionally intelligent leadership behaviors.

These prior studies make a consistent argument that leadership development should stretch beyond classroom instruction. With that position in mind, the second research question is:

RQ2: What are the recommendations among educators from U.S. undergraduate public relations programs for developing the next generation of industry leaders?

Methods

The study began with a qualitative content analysis of website content regarding leadership development for all 110 undergraduate programs offering a public relations major (Appendix A) that are accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), hold Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), or have both distinctions. This decision was based on the premise that these programs meet similar national standards. A second phase of the study included interviews with a sample of program leaders and/or educators to further explore leadership development best practices inside and outside of the classroom for public relations majors. The sample for the interviews was drawn from the full list of 110 programs and determined based on an analysis of these programs' websites, as well as using a snowball sampling method (Stacks, 2016).

As part of the qualitative content analysis, the researchers conducted thematic analysis of website content for 110 U.S. programs offering an undergraduate public relations major to identify the extent to which leadership development is being addressed. This process, common in qualitative research, involved determining the essential information to know about each program and developing a guide to identifying, recording, and ultimately comparing such information (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Based upon the literature review, the researchers determined essential information for recruitment purposes, including whether the program's website mentions leadership development in the undergraduate PR program description; mentions leadership in any of the PR course descriptions; offers a specific course on PR leadership/management, and whether that course is optional or required for PR students; whether the program has a PRSSA chapter; and whether leadership development is mentioned as a focus of that PRSSA chapter.

A thorough qualitative content analysis generally involves more than one researcher reviewing an entire data set and looking at each dimension in question, then drawing thematic conclusions based upon that comprehensive investigation (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The researchers worked independently at first, with each person reviewing all of the programs' websites and recording notes for each program, specific to the dimensions of essential information outlined above. The researchers subsequently compiled all of their notes into a cohesive spreadsheet for comparison, resolving or discarding any areas of substantive disagreement.

The qualitative analysis of website content helped form the essential foundation of knowledge from which an interview guide was developed. To choose programs for the interview phase, the researchers identified the programs that conveyed the most information about leadership development on their websites. As a whole, 18 U.S. programs

were identified that explicitly emphasized leadership development in their curricular descriptions online; two of these programs were eliminated from the interview phase to minimize potential author bias in the study. An additional program was included in the interview process based on recommendations of primary interviewees; this purposive snowball process helped ensure a rich set of interviews. As Table 1 shows, the 19 interview subjects represented 17 U.S. universities, representing both public and private institutions, as well as those with large and small enrollments.

The second phase of the study involved semi-structured interviews ($n = 19$) with directors of the programs having the most robust information about leadership development on their websites, based on the qualitative content analysis of website content for all undergraduate public relations programs across the United States. An interview guide (Appendix B), based on literature findings and the website content analysis, ensured consistency in topics being discussed with participants.

Notably, the interview subjects possessed extensive experience in the professional industry and the classroom, as well as with managing academic programs. Participants, on average, had 14 years of teaching experience (range = 4 to 34 years), with seven years as PR sequence director (range = 1 to 30 years). In addition, participants had, on average, 11 years of professional experience (range = 3 to 25 years), largely in agency or corporate settings. Some also had worked in health care, government, military, and other sectors.

All 19 phone interviews were recorded and fully transcribed, representing 10 hours of interviews. The researchers used open coding when reviewing transcripts to identify major themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They initially worked independently and then worked collaboratively to refine their examples that illustrate the major themes.

Findings

The study identified best practices for developing the next generation of leaders, including leadership training, curriculum revision, and more experiential learning opportunities.

Defining Leadership

When asked to define what leadership is today in PR, participants most often said leadership means having a vision of how to help move an organization or industry forward, thinking strategically and providing counsel. One respondent said, “Leadership means making decisions for our company and really being able to influence the strategy for different organizations.” Another respondent said: “It’s about defining a vision and setting an example.” One respondent noted:

It means to have a clear vision about the role of public relations as a strategic function of management; to take the responsibility of this important advising role; to be on top of your game in terms of time management, supporting your team, working as a team leader, and accomplishing your tasks according to the expectations of your supervisors.

The participants considered leadership to involve motivating staff members and helping them grow, especially by providing a professional and ethical example of what it means to lead.

Finally, participants talked about leadership in terms of simply managing a team or project and collaborating to get the necessary work accomplished. A respondent explained:

Leadership falls into the traditional realm of leadership in terms of managing employees, managing people. But I think in public relations it takes on a slightly other track as well, and that would be taking leadership on particular projects with multiple audiences simultaneously.

Developing Leadership Skills

Consistent with Berger's (2012) findings, program leaders agreed that students and practitioners must develop change management, listening, and conflict management skills. Overall, the interviewees agreed with these findings and most often discussed change management. They noted that it is fundamental for both students and practitioners to understand and manage change because the world is transforming at such a fast pace; change is inevitable. As one respondent said: "PR people can be a catalyst for change. They're the only ones—and I teach this—PR people are the only ones who are prepared or trained to be environmental scanners both internally and externally to an organization." Another respondent said:

We will continue facing transformations of audiences, issues, and realities, especially socioeconomic and political reality. So definitely knowing how to understand and approach change, it will be fundamental...Change is going to also bring conflict, and we see those conflicts playing out right now in the political realm.

Some interview participants raised the point that change management, listening, and conflict management skills are related because listening helps manage change, and effective change-management skills will help minimize and resolve conflicts. One respondent explained:

To communicate with our various stakeholders in public relations, you have to listen. That is the way by which we get feedback, which then enables us to go back and modify, reinforce, or even keep things the way they are.

Best Practices for Cultivating Leadership

The results suggested four components for undergraduate public relations programs to help develop the next generation of leaders: train faculty about leadership, infuse leadership principles in every class, encourage students to pursue leadership opportunities, and provide

Table 1
Interview Subjects' Experience (years)

University*	Professional	Teaching
Ball State	19	6
Boston**	14	14
Brigham Young	15	22
Drake	6	10
Illinois State	16	13
Loyola	3	28
Louisiana State	25	26
Ohio Northern	5	9
Ohio Northern	8	16
Penn State	10+	9
San Diego State	21	10
Syracuse	7	21
Temple	12	14
Florida	7	19
Florida	4	4
Georgia	15	15
Maryland	8	34
Oklahoma	23	16
Virginia Commonwealth	5	5

*University of Alabama and Kent State University were excluded to minimize bias in the study.

**The inclusion of Boston University was recommended by interview participants.

accessible leadership opportunities through PRSSA, a student agency and experiential learning.

Train faculty about leadership. Interviewees emphasized the value of focusing faculty training and professional development on leadership. The more that faculty are familiar with leadership concepts, the more likely they seem to be able to intentionally integrate leadership development into courses. One respondent explained:

We need to get outside of our comfort zone...discover what are our leadership styles. What are our unconscious biases? We have to learn those things ourselves...because we can't expect our students to do things that we ourselves haven't attempted to do, learn, or understand.

Another respondent advocated a need for training:

I don't think we're doing a good job of teaching leadership. I'm sure there maybe are faculty who have either had more professional experience to complement their graduate work or who have more of a business-academic background...they have more development in leadership.... I've never had any leadership training formally.

Interview participants also recommended talking to faculty and exploring other undergraduate public relations programs to obtain ideas for leadership development. The educators suggested sharing leadership-related assignments, assessment methods, and coaching and mentoring activities for PRSSA and student agencies. Finally, participants recommended reading recent research on leadership and looking critically at faculty experience in leadership.

Infuse leadership principles into every class. Less than half of the programs offer a class specifically in public relations leadership or management. Indeed, based on both the analysis of website content and interviews, most of the programs included in the interview process cannot

or do not offer specialized classes in leadership, which is consistent with Berger's (2015) conclusions. When it comes to leadership development, the message from interview participants was loud and clear: Infuse these concepts in every class and get the core curriculum right because adding specialized classes in leadership isn't easy or even necessarily more effective. Of the 110 universities included in the website analysis process, fewer than half of the programs offer a public relations management and/or leadership class, but all make a concerted effort to address leadership in the core public relations courses, particularly writing, case studies, research methods, and campaigns/capstone. One respondent explained, "We start in the classroom because that's where we can have, I think, the greatest and most immediate impact on teaching leadership skills." The best advice for administrators and educators is simply to build from the foundation they have in place. Nearly all suggested infusing leadership development within existing classes, rather than creating standalone courses focused on leadership. Part of the reason is simply because of accreditation and the associated credit-hour constraints.

They use service learning and/or group projects as teaching methods but provide coaching on leadership first. One respondent noted:

One easy way (to teach about leadership) is the group assignments we have in all of our classes at all the levels so that students learn how to work together. And, we often—not always, it sort of depends on the assignment—will ask the students to pay attention to their group dynamics so that we can discuss how it is that certain things happen in their groups, including leadership emergence, but especially group dynamics.

On the leadership development front, the programs have students conduct personality self-assessments, assign case studies for reading and discussion, and require students to interview and write about industry leaders. Some programs also provide PR-specific labs for certain required

courses so that students can apply their talents and grow in a controlled, focused environment.

Based on interviews, the assigned literature for leadership development heavily incorporates books, articles, and online resources, which describe an argument on the most important habits and skills an effective leader needs to possess, as well as personal growth. These pieces are written by journalists, business professionals, government officials, and scholars who have vast leadership experience or connections and stories to tell about others who exhibited good leadership skills. These books also give students tips on how to polish their communication skills. Other required books focused on the principles and theories of public relations, or professors encouraged students to stay current through news and business publications. These texts were often used in conjunction with another. Recurring authors included Heath Brothers, Jim Collins, Charles Duhigg, Peter Northouse, Tom Rath, and Peter Smudde.

Some educators used resources from the Institute of Public Relations, Page Center, Plank Center, and PRSA to facilitate leadership discussions. Multicultural case studies were often mentioned as reading materials for students to learn about diversity and inclusion within the public relations practice. These case studies were compiled from texts, professional trade journals, online resources, and the PRSA Silver Anvil competition.

Help students overcome fear of failure. Educators discussed the importance of coaching students to step up to take on leadership opportunities without fear of failure, which aligns with prior research (Remund & Ewing, 2015) indicating senior public relations practitioners supported the value of young practitioners and students taking risks and learning from mistakes. Experience builds confidence and leadership. One respondent said: “Help students stand up and have a voice and to take risks and occasionally fail. This generation hasn’t really been allowed to

do that. It's a much different student than even 10 years ago." Another respondent further explained:

We don't spend time developing them [students] as humans and a lot of times we push that off to the Career Center, which I don't think is as capable as we are at developing them and getting them to apply those concepts back to the work they'll be doing in the disciplines.

The educators interviewed for this study considered their vibrant PRSSA chapters as essential to grooming young leaders, which is consistent with Haber et al.'s (2012) findings. A respondent said, "Giving students the opportunity to operate in that environment where the stakes are a little bit higher than a grade and they can exercise leadership... that's a huge part of the way forward." Another respondent noted, "We also provide students with plenty of opportunities I will say nowadays to engage with the practice, both here at the college and in internships, and also in professional conferences and activities."

The respondents also emphasized how rich their curricula are with group projects and service-learning opportunities, exemplified by capstone campaign courses that involve working with real clients on complex issues. One respondent noted: "Here are teachable moments about leadership, especially when things don't go well, especially with a service-learning client." Another respondent agreed, "Service learning is always really helpful. Many of our classes work with real clients. It helps students develop a sense of initiative. Any kind of real-world experience is helpful because it creates opportunities to require students to lead."

Likewise, respondents mentioned that their student agencies are a tremendous incubator for fostering leadership, especially when the firm is guided by a faculty member with strong professional experience. One respondent noted:

The agency fosters the opportunity for students to grow into leaders...For example, [the agency was helpful for] one student who is smart and capable but lacked confidence in herself. It was great to watch that she started to believe in herself and see the growth.

Finally, the participants expressed that their internship programs are exceptional in terms of longevity and scope, often involving corporations, agencies, and other partners in out-of-state markets, including some of the biggest cities in the United States.

Assessing student growth in soft skills remains a challenge. Leadership is an abstract concept and is often not explicit in term of learning outcomes. To that end, many participants discussed challenges with evaluation and assessment. Most suggested incorporating peer reviews, conducting interviews with students, and/or assigning reflections, either as an individual writing project or group discussion. Several participants reiterated the importance of quality grading by instructors. Some participants discussed the use of exit interviews with senior students about their proficiency in a number of topics, including leadership. One respondent shared:

We have a series of questions that we personally answer about the students...we look at their resume and their portfolio, not only are we looking at what kind of experiences they have but one of the questions directly asks about what leadership experiences they had while they were in school. It doesn't necessarily ask them to judge them or for us to qualify them, but at least we look to see where they have had leadership positions at any point in their college career, not just within the PR-related organizations.

Discussion

The first research question for this study centered on what U.S. undergraduate programs are doing in the area of leadership development. All of the programs participating in the interviews emphasize leadership in their core public relations classes, namely writing, case studies, research methods, and campaigns/capstone. Philosophically, this finding suggests that leadership development is more than simply traits or skills, but rather competencies that must be honed over time and through various experiences. That sense of acquired adaptability is also consistent with the notion of change management as an essential leadership skill needed in the future, according to Berger (2012). On the other hand, a specific course in leadership would undoubtedly offer significantly greater opportunities for students to learn about the various models of leadership, which models apply best to their individual personalities and strengths, and how to determine which method of leadership would work best in a given situation. That kind of comprehension and application certainly could not be possible in the context of a core course such as writing or research methods.

The second research question centered around recommendations that educators would offer for developing the next generation of leaders. Educators and program directors emphasized the importance of recruiting faculty with leadership experience and/or providing training opportunities for faculty to learn more about leadership development. Educators need to be informed about and comfortable with leadership so they can guide students to become effective leaders. One respondent noted, “The best bet is to infuse it (leadership principles), but unless... the faculty member has some expertise in it, they don’t usually teach it.” Participants suggested that faculty infuse leadership in every class and encourage students to participate in PRSSA and/or a student agency, as a de facto learning lab for leadership development. Educators felt it important that leadership be

covered in all core courses and that students seek extracurricular ways to put leadership concepts into action. This notion of experiential learning is certainly consistent with the model of U.S. undergraduate public relations education. However, the onus is put squarely on the student to figure out what being a leader really entails, in an applied circumstance such as the PRSSA chapter or student agency. Faculty supervision, if any, would be minimal, and even less so would be in-the-moment coaching from a faculty advisor. Educators emphasized the importance of presenting leadership opportunities for students and encouraging students to lead inside and outside the classroom. One respondent said:

We really emphasize with students that you need to be on top of your game. You need to develop your own voice. You need to be self-directed. You need to be self-driven. You need to seek opportunities and take advantage of opportunities.

Ultimately, one is left to question just how consistently students can learn about leadership, given the time constraints of core courses and the freedom of a student-run PRSSA chapter or agency. Indeed, participants nearly unanimously agreed that assessment and evaluation are difficult at best when it comes to teaching leadership development. These findings underscore prior findings that suggest leadership development is lacking in public relations education and that greater training in leadership is crucial (Bronstein & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Meng, 2015).

This qualitative study sheds important light on the fact that greater leadership development is sorely needed in public relations. One respondent advocated this need:

We have to teach them how to be good managers of people; how to give feedback; how to understand how non-verbal communication might translate; how to be sensitive; and how to be good listeners. All those real basic things...but they're not so basic. We (educators) just haven't done a good job in our public relations

curriculum. And as much as we want to say: “Oh, that’s what the business school teaches; we cannot wait and rely on business schools.”

Another respondent noted: “I’m glad you all are doing this study I’ve done a little bit of digging around and maybe there are some new courses, but I don’t think we’re doing a good job of teaching leadership.”

Though there are no silver bullets or straightforward solutions, one thing is clear from these findings: programs find a common strength in building upon their core courses and their primary extracurricular programs, such as PRSSA and student-run agencies. Adding specialized classes and additional experiences may not be necessary or even desirable; the most directly applicable learning may come in the most familiar of places: the classroom and the PRSSA chapter or client meeting. This study reinforced the need for leadership development to support the success of public relations graduates and public relations. One respondent noted:

Leadership in PR—in spite of the Plank Center and a few academics—is underserved and hasn’t been developed as much... we need to develop the field more, and we’ll graduate better students able to take leadership roles in the field. If we can help create talent, you know, leadership talent and people who can think for themselves, we’ll do the field a great service.

Limitations and Future Research

Qualitative research is appropriate to employ when exploring areas of inquiry that have not been studied to a substantial extent yet. To that end, this mixed-methods study employs qualitative research in an appropriate way, yielding new insights that had not previously been discovered through other means of scholarly research. However, findings from qualitative research cannot be generalized to a broader universe, and, therefore, their meaning holds true only within the context of the studied population. That depth of insight, both rich and substantive, speaks strictly

to the subjects under analysis; a statistically sound quantitative study would be necessary to extrapolate these findings. In that spirit, a forced-response survey of a representative sample of all U.S. program directors would yield generalizable findings.

Still, learning and leadership development are organic and dynamic processes; the perspectives of the varied participants in this study affirm that fact. Quantitative research would yield generalizable data, yet such findings would simply serve as an underpinning and framework. Program directors and educators at all ranks would benefit, as well, from further qualitative and mixed-methods research, particularly related to pedagogical methods and student outcomes. Digging deep is what public relations educators need from future leadership development research – and it is what their students deserve in order to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

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Appendix A
ACEJMC-Accredited and/or CEPR-Certified Programs
Included in Website Audit

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
Abilene Christian University	Journalism and Mass Communication Department
American University	School of Communication and Journalism
Arkansas State University	Department of Communication
Auburn University	School of Communication and Journalism
Ball State University	Department of Journalism
Baylor University	Journalism, Public Relations and New Media
Bowling Green State University	Department of Journalism and Public Relations
Brigham Young University	School of Communications
Buffalo State University	Communication Department
California State University, Chico	Department of Journalism and Public Relations
California State University, Fullerton	College of Communications
California State University, Long Beach	Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
California State University, Northridge	Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication
Central Michigan University	College of Communication and Fine Arts

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
Drake University	School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Eastern Illinois University	Department of Journalism
Eastern Kentucky University	College of Business and Technology
Elon University	School of Communications
Ferris State University	College of Business
Florida A&M University	Division of Journalism
Florida International University	Journalism and Mass Communication
Grambling State University	Department of Mass Communication
Hampton University	Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications
Hofstra University	Department of Journalism, Media Studies and Public Relations
Howard University	School of Communications
Illinois State University	School of Communication
Indiana University, Bloomington	The Media School
Iona College	Department of Mass Communication
Iowa State University	Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
Jacksonville State University	Department of Communication
Kansas State University	AQ Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications
Kent State University	School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Lee University	Communication Arts
Louisiana State University	Manship School of Mass Communication
Loyola University, New Orleans	School of Mass Communication
Marquette University	Diederich College of Communication
Marshall University	W. Page Pitt School of Journalism and Mass Communications
Middle Tennessee State University	College of Media and Entertainment
Monmouth University	Department of Communication
Murray State University	Journalism and Mass Communication
Nicholls State University	Department of Mass Communication
Norfolk State University	Department of Mass Communications and Journalism
North Carolina A and T State University	Journalism and Mass Communication
Ohio Northern University	Communication and Media Studies

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
Ohio University	E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
Oklahoma State University	School of Media and Strategic Communications
Penn State University	College of Communications
Radford University	College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences
Rowan University	College of Communication and Creative Arts
San Diego State University	School of Journalism & Media Studies
San Jose State University	Journalism and Mass Communications Department
Savannah State University	Department of Journalism and Mass Communications
Seton Hall University	College of Communication and the Arts
Shippensburg University	Department of Communication/ Journalism
South Dakota State University	Journalism and Mass Communication
Southeast Missouri State University	Department of Mass Media
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville	Department of Mass Communications
Southern University	Department of Mass Communication
St. Cloud State University	Communication Studies

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
Syracuse University	Newhouse School of Public Communications
Temple University	School of Media and Communication
Texas Christian University	Bob Schieffer College of Communication
Texas State University	School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Union University	Communication Arts Department
University of Cincinnati	College of Arts and Sciences
University of Alabama	College of Communication and Information Sciences
University of Alabama, Birmingham	Department of Communication Studies
University of Alaska	Department of Journalism and Communication. Note: Strategic Communication Concentration and the major Journalism and Public Communication
University of Arkansas	Walter J. Lemke Department of Journalism
University of Central Missouri	Department of Economics, Finance and Marketing
University of Colorado, Boulder	College of Media, Communication and Information
University of Florida	College of Journalism and Communications
University of Georgia	Henry W. Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communications
University of Idaho	Department of Journalism and Mass Media

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign	College of Media. Note: College offers a certificate in PR, no degree
University of Iowa	School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Kansas	William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications
University of Kentucky	College of Communication and Information
University of Louisiana, Lafayette	Department of Communication
University of Maryland at College Park	Department of Communication
University of Memphis	Department of Journalism
University of Minnesota	Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Mississippi	The Meek School of Journalism and New Media
University of Missouri	School of Journalism
University of Nebraska, Lincoln	College of Journalism and Mass Communications
University of Nevada, Reno	The Reynolds School
University of New Mexico	Department of Communication and Journalism. Note: Called Strategic Communication
University of North Alabama	Department of Communications
University of North Carolina	School of Media and Journalism

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
University of North Carolina, Charlotte	Department of Communication Studies
University of North Texas	Frank W and Sue Mayborn School of Journalism
University of Oklahoma	Gaylord College
University of Oregon	School of Journalism and Communication
University of South Carolina	College of Information and Communications
University of South Dakota	Department of Media and Journalism
University of Southern California, Annenberg	School for Communication and Journalism
University of Southern Mississippi	School of Mass Communication and Journalism
University of Tennessee	Communications Department
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	Communication
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	College of Communication and Information
University of Washington	Department of Communication
University of Wisconsin, Eau-Claire	Department of Communication and Journalism. Note: Called Integrated Strategic Communications, PR Emphasis
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh	Department of Journalism
Virginia Commonwealth University	Richard Robertson School of Media and Culture

University	Name of College/School Housing PR Program
Virginia Polytechnic University	College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
Washington and Lee University	Department of Journalism and Mass Communications
Wayne State University	Department of Communication
West Virginia University	Reed College of Media
Western Kentucky University	School of Journalism and Broadcasting
Winthrop University	Department of Mass Communication

Appendix B
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you, again, for volunteering to participate in this research project. Today's interview should take no more than 30 minutes.

As you know from our email exchange, we are studying leadership development and inclusiveness within public relations curricula. We are talking with PR sequence directors and PR instructors. Our intent is to identify best practices and provide recommendations to the academy about how we can all help better develop the next generation of public relations leaders.

I'd like to remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary. You may now refuse to participate, or if you choose to participate as intended, you may stop today's interview for any reason and at any point in the process.

Your responses will remain strictly confidential, unless you provide approval now, or at the end of today's interview, for us to identify you with

all or some of your replies. Otherwise, your input will simply be included in aggregate themes within the final report. Would you like to provide approval now, or shall we discuss this again at the end of the interview?

Finally, I'd like to remind you that research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 541-346-2510 or by e-mail to ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu. If you contact the IRB, please refer to study number #16-146.

At this time, I would like to confirm your participation in this research. Please say "yes" now, if you are willing to be interviewed. This will serve as your consent.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? The only use of the recording is for data collection and analysis. Do you have any questions or concerns before the interview begins?

1. Let's begin. I would first like to confirm a few details, simply for statistical purposes.

- Tell me how many years you have served as PR sequence director (if applicable).
- How many years have you been teaching public relations courses?
- Did you work in the industry before joining the academy? If so, for what type of organization: corporation/business, agency/consulting firm, nonprofit organization, government, or other (please specify)?

2. In your own words, tell me what you believe leadership means today in public relations.

3. And how about inclusiveness in public relations?

4. What do you feel would be the best way to develop the next generation of inclusive public relations leaders?

5. A global research survey of thousands of practitioners worldwide identified the most pressing leadership needs as change management skills/capabilities, listening skills, and conflict management skills. How do you feel about this assessment? Why?

6. What is your program doing well when it comes to fostering leadership development and/or inclusiveness? Please share a few examples.

For specific programs identified:

6a. Tell me about (name of course/program). Is this a requirement for PR students? Other students? What are the learning objectives?

6b. What is the structure and methods used to teach?

6c. Describe the core content. Is it possible to obtain a copy of the syllabus?

6d. Are diversity and inclusiveness covered within the course/program? If so, please briefly explain. If not, how and where is diversity addressed in the PR curriculum?

6e. What textbook(s) or other educational materials/resources are used?

6f. How is student learning evaluated?

7. Are there other examples of leadership development and/or inclusiveness that come to mind within your own teaching? What teaching methods, assignments or other techniques do you use to foster leadership development and/or inclusiveness, beyond those already described? Please share a few examples.

8. What advice would you give to a school that's just starting a public relations program, or to someone new to teaching public relations, with regard to fostering leadership development and/or inclusiveness?

9. When it comes to excellence in public relations education, what programs immediately come to your mind? Why?

10. We are nearing the end of this interview. What haven't we touched on today about leadership development and inclusiveness in public relations education that is important to include in this study?

NOTE: If subject did not provide approval for identity disclosure earlier, read the following:

As a reminder, your responses will remain strictly confidential, unless you provide approval for us to identify you with all or some of your replies. Otherwise, your input will simply be included in aggregate themes within the final report. Would you like to provide approval for us to disclose your identity? If so, for all replies or only some of them? If only some of them, which replies?

Thank you very much for your time.