

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2019
**Applying Industry Standards to Public Relations
Evaluation: Barcelona Principles (2.0)
vs. Award-Winning Cases**

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Rationale

As an important step in the ROPES (Research Objectives Programming Evaluation Stewardship) process, evaluation is crucial for the success of public relations campaigns. However, although progress has been made both in academia and the profession, evaluation is still a step that is often glossed over in practice, even in many award-winning cases (Schriner, Swenson, & Gilkerson, 2017). This in-class activity is an integral part of instruction on the evaluation of public relations campaigns/programs for an introductory level class. It provides an interactive and active learning environment where students collaboratively apply industry evaluation standards from the Barcelona Principles 2.0 (AMEC, 2015) through critiques of an award-winning campaign's evaluation section in class. It sets up the standards of excellence as students continue their public relations education and prepare for a career in the industry.

Student Learning Goals

Upon completion of this in-class activity, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the industry standards in public relations evaluation;

- Critically analyze the evaluation section of award-winning public relations cases following the guidance from the Barcelona Principles 2.0;
- Effectively apply industry standards to the evaluation of public relations campaigns and programs in the final case study project.

Connection to Public Relations Theory and Practice

This in-class activity provides students with an active learning experience to understand and apply the Barcelona Principles (2.0) to the evaluation of public relations campaigns and programs. Furthermore, by critically analyzing the evaluation part of an award-winning campaign, it allows students to identify the current gap in public relations measurement and evaluation and to reflect on how they may improve the practice of public relations evaluation in their upcoming advanced-level courses (e.g., public relations campaigns) and career.

Evidence of Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes may be assessed via the in-class activity and in students' subsequent analyses of a public relations campaign case for their final project. In the in-class activity, the same prompts were asked twice—at the beginning of the class and after the lecture on the Barcelona Principles 2.0 (with an additional question at the end; see the Appendix for the specific prompts). First, students' learning outcomes were demonstrated in the contrast between their answers to the prompts before and after the lecture. As shown in previous activities, students were likely to be primed with the halo effect of the award-winning cases and tended to emphasize what the campaign did well, instead of providing critiques when they first attempted to answer the prompts, even after they had completed the readings prior to the class. As they obtained more in-depth understanding of each principle via the lecture and further discussions, they felt more comfortable using the principles to critique the case and propose ideas of their own.

Subsequently, students were asked to apply the Barcelona Principles (2.0) to their final projects, where they were asked to provide in-depth analysis following the ROPES process for a public relations campaign case of their choice. The learning outcomes then may be assessed again by their analysis of the evaluation part. Students were able to provide critiques on campaign evaluation and propose revised measurement and evaluation plans following the industry standards. In the course feedback, students indicated that this in-class activity prepared them well for the final case analysis paper.

References

- AMEC. (2015). *Launch of Barcelona Principles 2.0. Association for Measurement and Evaluation in Communication*. Retrieved from <https://amecorg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Barcelona-Principles-2.pdf>
- Schrinder, M., Swenson, R., & Gilkerson, N. (2017). Outputs or outcomes? Assessing public relations evaluation practices in award-winning PR campaigns. *Public Relations Journal*, 11(1), 1-15. Retrieved from https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1481&context=comm_fac

Appendix

In-Class Activity Instructions and Notes

Prior to the class, students are assigned to read a Public Relations Society of America Silver Anvil Award case. The case may be changed from year to year to reflect the most recent practices. As the class starts, the instructor may remind students about the case via visual presentation, such as pictures and videos of the campaign materials.

After presenting and reviewing the case, the instructor could provide the students with a handout detailing the prompts. The following

prompts can be printed on each side of the handout and answered at the beginning of the class and then again after the lecture on public relations campaign evaluation and the Barcelona Principles:

- If you were an executive at (client organization), what questions would you ask the public relations team when you are presented with this campaign evaluation report?
- Do you think this is a good evaluation report? Why or why not?

Note on instruction: Have students form into groups of three or four depending on class size after reviewing the case. Provide them with time to work on the prompts individually first and then discuss them as a group. Students should write down their answers on the front page of the handout. Following the activity, the instructor may ask students to keep the questions in mind and deliver a lecture explaining public relations evaluation and the Barcelona Principles (2.0). After the lecture, ask students to discuss the same prompts again and write down their answers on the back page of the handout.

During the discussion after the lecture, the instructor may walk around to facilitate students' discussions by pointing them to certain principles. For example, after pointing out the differences between outputs and outcomes (Principle 2 "measuring communication outcomes is recommended versus only measuring outputs"), students may start to question what "coverage" and "impression" would entail. They may also start making connections between the campaign results and business performance (Principle 3 "the effect on organizational performance can and should be measured where possible"). After pointing out the importance of transparent reporting and validity of measurement (Principle 7 "measurement and evaluation should be transparent, consistent and valid"), students may start questioning what the metrics

(e.g., “impression,” “sentiment,” “engagement”) mean and how they were obtained. After discussions, the instructor may bring the questions up to the whole class for the groups to bounce off each other’s insights. The instructor could then write each group’s answers on the white board to compare and contrast.

Finally, the following prompt can be provided after the second round of discussion: Based on what we learned from the Barcelona Principles (2.0) and previous discussions, how would you improve the evaluation plan of this campaign?

Note on instruction: Depending on class size and time, the instructor may assign each group a specific principle to apply as they brainstorm ideas to improve the evaluation plan. Provide time for groups to discuss and walk around to facilitate discussion. After individual group discussion, bring the question to the whole class and write answers on the white board. Summarize and revisit the key learning points to conclude the class and indicate their application to the final case analysis project (if applicable) and future practice.