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Note from the Editor-in-Chief:

We are pleased to launch JPRE's first special issue. This issue spotlights research conducted by the Commission on Public Relations Education in a research article written by former CPRE co-chair Marcia DiStaso. In addition, this issue features a teaching brief written by CPRE member Denise Bortree on the topic of ethics education, which directly relates to the biggest recommendation from CPRE after its omnibus survey: the need for each public relations program to have a standalone ethics class.

As usual, the editorial team listed above invested hours of work into proofreading, formatting and preparing this issue. Thank you to each of them.

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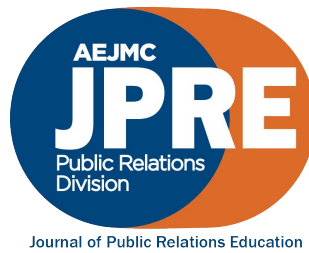


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Denise Bortree



Dear JPRES Readers:

We are pleased to introduce this special issue, which includes the article “Undergraduate Public Relations in the United States: The 2017 Commission on Public Relations Report,” by Dr. Marcia DiStaso, Past Co-chair, Educators, Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE).

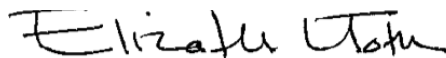
Dr. DiStaso’s article highlights the omnibus survey results of public relations practitioner and educator perceptions of how we can best prepare undergraduates to enter the field of public relations. The survey’s findings were a basis for the CPRE 2017 Report on Undergraduate Education, *Fast Forward: Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners.*

The latest of several major reports released by the Commission since its founding in 1973, *Fast Forward* includes several recommendations on undergraduate curricula that have been adopted by the PRSA Educational Affairs Committee as criteria for Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR). The report offers chapters by content experts on ethics, theory, research, technology, academic structure and governance, educator credentials, online public relations education, program certification and accreditation, internships, professional and pre-professional organizations, diversity, and global perspectives on public relations. It is available at www.commissionpred.org.

Recognized internationally as the “authoritative voice” for the advancement of public relations education, the Commission brings together public relations educators and practitioners on its 65-member board in this important cause. Board members represent over 20 public relations professional and academic organizations. Commission work groups are currently developing recommendations for new writing, ethics, and online courses based on its latest findings. In addition, the Commission sponsors regional educator/practitioner summits to help develop ways to better serve employers and the students who will be tomorrow’s leaders in our field. Overall, CPRE is committed to ensure that undergraduate public relations meets the demands of today’s and tomorrow’s public relations profession.



Judith T. Phair, APR, Fellow, PRSA
Practitioner Co-chair
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Undergraduate Public Relations in the United States: The 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education Report

Marcia DiStaso, University of Florida

As history books document, the field of public relations dates back to the early 20th century. Since then, society and public relations have evolved. This evolution has led to multiple definitions of public relations over the years, and, in fact, the term still continues to evolve today. Currently, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines public relations as, “A strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, n.d., para. 3). In October 2019, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) announced its new definition of public relations as, “A decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organisations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods” (IPRA, 2019, para. 2).

As the public relations profession has evolved, so has education. Edward Bernays is credited with writing the first public relations textbook and teaching the first class in 1923 (Broom & Sha, 2013). Fifty years later, in 1973, the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) was founded. Since then, this group has combined insight from academics and practitioners to provide recommendations on public relations education around the globe. These recommendations have impacted both graduate and undergraduate education as many academic programs have aligned their course offerings as a result of CPRE recommendations. Plus, CPRE

recommendations serve as the foundation for the criteria for the Public Relations Student Society of America's chapter standards (PRSSA, 2019) and the Certification in Education for Public Relations (CPRE, 2006).

Following the recommendations from the 1999 CPRE report, "A Port of Entry," academic public relations programs commonly included courses in the following topics:

- Introduction to public relations
- Public relations research, measurement and evaluation
- Public relations writing and production
- Supervised work experience in public relations (internship)

In 2006, the CPRE recommended that public relations programs should include these four core courses plus the following addition: a public relations course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies, or campaigns.

The purpose of this article is to present the combined findings from the CPRE omnibus survey that is spread across the 17 chapters in the report *Fast Forward: Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners*. Many of the chapters include the results from educators and practitioners from outside of the United States for a global perspective. This article, however, is delimited to the results for U.S. respondents to highlight the current state of undergraduate public relations education in the United States.

Method

This research built onto past CPRE reports on undergraduate education, mainly *A Port of Entry: Public Relations Education for the 21st Century* (1999) and *The Professional Bond* (2006). Similar to those reports, an extensive omnibus survey was also conducted. Where appropriate, the questionnaire remained the same; however, given the vast

changes in the public relations field over the last decade, few specifics were retained.

Survey Distribution

While past CPRE surveys were distributed to a stratified random sample of members in public relations associations, that approach in 2016 was not preferred due to typically low survey responses and difficulty obtaining membership lists. Therefore, the 2016 omnibus survey was distributed by email to CPRE members. The individual representatives for these associations invited their members and colleagues to participate in the survey. These members represented the following organizations:

- Arthur W. Page Center
- Arthur W. Page Society
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass \ Communication (AEJMC) Public Relations Division
- Canadian Public Relations Society
- European Public Relations Education and Research Association
- Global Alliance for Public Relations
- Institute for Public Relations (IPR)
- International Communication Association (ICA) Public Relations Division
- National Black Public Relations Society
- National Communication Association (NCA) Public Relations Division
- Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations
- PR Council
- Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educators Academy

- Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educational Affairs Committee
- PRSA Foundation
- Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)
- The Corporate Board/Society of New Communications Research (SNCR)
- Universal Accreditation Board (UAB)

The survey was open for participation from October 10 to December 19, 2016. Given that the survey distribution was through CPRE member associations, using their own recruitment process, it is not possible to calculate the number of people who actually received the survey.

Overall, a total of 1,601 questionnaires were started. Respondents who indicated they were not in public relations (or a related field) were removed ($n = 48$), along with anyone who took fewer than 10 minutes on the survey. This survey had a high drop-out rate given that it took an average of 25 minutes to complete ($n = 738$). The focus of this article is on undergraduate public relations education in the United States, so all respondents from other countries were removed ($n = 124$).

The questionnaire began with a filter question that asked respondents to identify as an educator, as a practitioner, or as someone not in public relations (or a related field). Based on responses to this question, participants were filtered to either an educator or a practitioner survey. If they were not in public relations, they were thanked for their time, and the survey concluded. The questionnaire contained eight sections. The final sample included in this article was 690, comprised of 231 educators and 459 practitioners.

Results

Demographics

The demographic information for this study is included in Table 1. Overall, 33% of respondents were educators ($n = 231$), and 67% were practitioners ($n = 459$). The percentage of female practitioners in this study matched the approximate percentage in the profession (74%, $n = 291$). The age distribution was skewed slightly younger in the practitioner sample than the educator sample; however, that is also consistent with both populations. The educator sample was predominantly white (94%, $n = 156$), and the practitioner sample was 77% white ($n = 354$), consistent with the lack of diversity in the field. Most educators had a Ph.D. (72%, $n = 134$), and most practitioners had a bachelor's degree (54%, $n = 209$). Only 38% of educators ($n = 92$) and 28% of practitioners ($n = 111$) had their Accreditation in Public Relations, and 1% of practitioners were Accredited Business Communicators ($n = 4$). The practitioners were from a variety of organizational settings and sizes. The educator sample included 70% tenured or tenure-track faculty ($n = 121$).

The practitioner sample had some academic experience, with 18% of the practitioners having taught as an adjunct ($n = 71$) and 58% having guest lectured in a public relations course ($n = 223$). On the job, 52% of practitioner respondents directly supervised entry-level practitioners ($n = 203$), while 61% had supervised an intern in the last five years ($n = 240$).

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

The KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities) from the 2006 survey were updated to better align with current public relations education and practice. As a result, only a few KSAs were assessed in both 2006 and 2016, resulting in minimal comparisons (see Table 2). Writing was one skill that was measured in both years. In 2016, the mean scores for desired writing skills increased for both educators (0.19 increase) and practitioners (0.41 increase). The mean scores for delivered or found writing skills also

Table 1: Survey Demographics		
	Educators	Practitioners
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	58.2% (n=107)	74.0% (n=291)
Male	41.3% (n=76)	25.2% (n=99)
Transgender	0	0.3% (n=1)
Do not identify as male, female or transgender	0.5% (n=1)	0.5% (n=2)
<i>Age</i>		
18-35	10.3% (n=17)	34.6% (n=123)
36-45	21.2% (n=35)	22.8% (n=81)
46-55	26.7% (n=44)	20.8% (n=74)
56-65	26.7% (n=44)	18.8% (n=67)
66+	15.1% (n=25)	3.1% (n=11)
<i>Race</i>		
African American / Black	0	1.7% (n=8)
Asian / Asian American	0	2.4% (n=11)
American Indian / Alaska Native	0	1.1% (n=5)
White / Caucasian	94.0% (n=156)	77.1% (n=354)
Other	0	0.8% (n=4)
Hispanic / Latino	3.2% (n=10)	5.2% (n=24)
<i>Highest Level of Education</i>		
No Degree	0	0.3% (n=1)
A.A. / A.S.	0	0.8% (n=3)
B.A. / B. S.	5.4% (n=10)	53.7% (n=209)
M.A. / M. S. / MBA	22.6% (n=42)	43.4% (n=169)
Terminal Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., D. BA., etc.)	72.0% (n=134)	1.85 (n=7)
Accredited in Public Relations (APR/APR+M)	37.9% (n=92)	28.3% (n=111)
ABC Accredited		1.0% (n=4)
Tenured or Tenure-Track	69.5% (n=121)	
Professional Experience	96.2% (n=152)	
Taught as an Adjunct Professor		18.2% (n=71)
Guest Lecturer in PR Course		57.5% (n=223)
Served on a University's Governing Body		10.7% (n=42)
Serve on a Site Visit for CEPR Certification	6.0% (n=11)	1.5% (n=6)
Served on a Site Visit for ACEJMC Accreditation	6.5% (n=12)	2.3% (n=9)
Served on CPRS Pathways Program Committee	0.5% (n=1)	0.8% (n=3)
Directly Involved in Supervising Entry-Level Pros		52.3% (n=203)
Supervised a PR Internship in the Last 5 Years		61.1% (n=240)
<i>Organizational Setting</i>		
Agency / Consultancy		21.6% (n=85)
Corporation		28.5% (n=112)
Educational Institution		12.5% (n=49)
Government / Military		10.9% (n=43)
Independent Practitioner		2.5% (n=10)
Nonprofit / Association		16.5% (n=65)
Other		7.4% (n=29)
<i>Number of Employees at Organization</i>		
25 or less		23.3% (n=91)
26 to 50		6.1% (n=24)
51 to 100		6.9% (n=27)
101 to 500		14.8% (n=58)
501 to 1,000		8.4% (n=33)
1,001 to 5,000		14.6% (n=57)
More than 5,000		25.8% (n=101)

educators and practitioners about the desirability of the KSAs (12 out of 30). Significant differences in desired KSAs for educators and practitioners included business acumen, crisis management, cultural perspective, ethics, internal communication, PR history, PR laws and regulations, public speaking, social media management, website development, problem solving, and strategic planning. In each of these, the educators in the survey rated the KSA more desired than the practitioners, except for ethics where the practitioners indicated a higher level of desire than the educators.

Table 2: Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs)

	2006				2016			
	Educators		Practitioners		Educators		Practitioners	
	Desired M (SD)	Delivered M (SD)	Desired M (SD)	Found M (SD)	Desired M (SD)	Delivered M (SD)	Desired M (SD)	Found M (SD)
<i>Knowledge</i>								
Business Acumen (D***) (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.09 (0.92)	2.97 (1.13)	3.66 (1.09)	2.10 (0.88)
Crisis Management (D*) (F***)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.30 (1.05)	3.37 (1.17)	2.52 (1.15)	1.48 (0.70)
Cultural Perspective (D***) (F***)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.02 (0.89)	3.38 (1.11)	3.70 (1.02)	2.89 (0.97)
Diversity & Inclusion (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.00 (1.00)	3.47 (1.14)	3.95 (1.06)	3.30 (1.02)
Ethics (D**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.44 (0.95)	4.11 (0.95)	4.57 (0.78)	3.37 (0.96)
Global Perspectives	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.73 (0.97)	3.23 (1.08)	3.16 (1.12)	2.37 (0.98)
Internal Communication (D***)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.76 (0.94)	3.04 (1.13)	3.44 (1.16)	2.39 (1.02)
Management (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.40 (1.12)	3.07 (1.19)	2.36 (1.20)	1.71 (0.86)
PR History (D**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.56 (1.26)	3.08 (1.16)	2.14 (1.13)	2.43 (1.15)
PR Laws & Regulations (D**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.82 (1.06)	3.20 (1.12)	3.48 (1.19)	2.34 (1.03)
PR Theory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.41 (1.28)	3.77 (1.03)	3.32 (1.20)	3.02 (1.08)
Social Issues (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.74 (1.02)	3.43 (1.06)	3.67 (1.00)	3.20 (0.96)
<i>Skills</i>								
App Development	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.33 (1.14)	1.60 (0.92)	1.90 (1.06)	1.63 (0.87)
Audio/Video Production (F***)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.12 (1.07)	2.79 (1.18)	2.86 (1.10)	2.23 (0.94)
Communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.78 (0.50)	4.44 (0.78)	4.76 (0.57)	3.31 (0.88)
Editing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.12 (0.90)	3.43 (1.14)	4.20 (0.95)	2.58 (0.95)
Graphic Design (F*)	4.01 (0.98)	3.22 (0.95)	3.55 (1.00)	3.13 (0.87)	3.56 (0.98)	2.88 (1.16)	2.95 (1.09)	2.38 (0.95)
Media Relations (F**)	4.43 (0.91)	2.93 (0.83)	4.26 (0.97)	2.71 (0.90)	4.18 (0.88)	3.63 (1.10)	3.93 (0.98)	2.57 (0.96)
Public Speaking (D***)	4.52 (0.91)	3.40 (0.76)	4.24 (0.99)	3.14 (0.82)	3.93 (0.93)	3.75 (1.09)	3.33 (1.24)	2.49 (1.00)
Research & Analytics	4.31 (0.97)	2.97 (0.88)	4.12 (0.96)	3.03 (0.99)	4.28 (0.86)	3.83 (1.04)	4.09 (0.98)	2.71 (0.93)
Social Media Management (D***) (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.52 (0.64)	3.77 (1.00)	4.33 (0.82)	3.84 (0.91)
Speechwriting (F***)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.81 (1.04)	2.35 (1.17)	2.83 (1.12)	1.86 (0.85)
Storytelling	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.00 (0.98)	3.34 (1.00)	4.04 (1.04)	2.54 (0.93)
Website Development (D**) (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.12 (1.08)	2.56 (1.17)	2.85 (1.23)	2.24 (1.01)
Writing	4.71 (0.82)	3.55 (0.85)	4.47 (0.93)	3.06 (0.97)	4.90 (0.37)	4.32 (0.83)	4.88 (0.41)	3.08 (0.94)
<i>Abilities</i>								
Analytical Thinking	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.46 (0.76)	3.78 (0.95)	4.35 (0.84)	2.60 (0.88)
Creative Thinking	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.52 (0.71)	3.78 (0.94)	4.57 (0.70)	3.38 (0.94)
Critical Thinking	4.43 (0.92)	3.05 (0.86)	4.63 (0.88)	3.00 (0.78)	4.53 (0.75)	3.91 (0.97)	4.44 (0.82)	2.65 (0.89)
Problem Solving (D*)	4.43 (0.92)	3.05 (0.86)	4.63 (0.88)	3.00 (0.78)	4.55 (0.65)	3.85 (0.96)	4.52 (0.77)	2.75 (0.89)
Strategic Planning (D***) (F**)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.97 (1.04)	3.90 (1.04)	3.35 (1.30)	2.08 (0.92)

(* = p<0.5, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001 for 2016 Desired for educators & practitioners and Found for educators & practitioners)
(Highlighting = highly desired, delivered or found)

The top three knowledge topics educators believed their programs delivered were: ethics ($M = 4.11, SD = 0.95$), PR theory ($M = 3.77, SD = 1.03$), and social issues ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.06$). The top three knowledge

topics found by practitioners were: ethics ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.96$), diversity and inclusion ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.02$), and social issues ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.96$).

The top three skills educators believed their programs delivered were: communication ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.78$), writing ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.83$), and research and analytics ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.04$). The top three skills found by practitioners were: social media management ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.91$), communication ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.88$), and writing ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.94$).

The top three abilities educators believed their programs delivered were: critical thinking ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.97$), strategic planning ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.04$), and problem solving ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.96$). The top three abilities found by practitioners were: creative thinking ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.94$), problem solving ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.89$), and critical thinking ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.89$).

There was a 43% inconsistency in agreement between educators and practitioners about recent graduates having these KSAs (13 out of 30). There were significant differences in KSAs delivered by educators and found by practitioners for business acumen, crisis management, cultural perspective, diversity and inclusion, management, social issues, audio/video development, graphic design, media relations, social media management, speechwriting, website development, and strategic planning. In each of these, educators rated the KSA delivered more frequently than the practitioners indicated finding them.

Hiring Characteristics/Experience

Practitioners were given a list of “possible hiring characteristics” of recent college graduates and were asked to consider what they look for in entry-level new hires (see Table 3). Practitioners rated the top five desired characteristics/experiences they look for when hiring (all are desired more than found):

1. Writing performance ($M = 4.88, SD = 0.40$); 1.98 gap in what is found
2. Internship or work experience ($M = 4.67, SD = 0.71$); 0.84 gap in what is found
3. Public relations coursework ($M = 4.47, SD = 0.83$); 0.50 gap in what is found
4. Strong references ($M = 4.22, SD = 0.92$); 0.86 gap in what is found
5. Up-to-date with current professional trends and issues ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.92$); 1.30 gap in what is found

Practitioners' scores resulted in this list of five least desired characteristics/experiences:

1. Certificate in public relations ($M = 2.38, SD = 1.18$)
2. Study abroad experience ($M = 2.39, SD = 1.12$)
3. Certifications (e.g., Hootsuite, Google Analytics, coding) ($M = 2.88, SD = 1.19$)
4. Caliber of university attended ($M = 3.02, SD = 1.07$)
5. Bi- or multi-lingual ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.22$)

Results showed five most commonly found characteristics/experiences in new hires:

1. Active on social media ($M = 4.40, SD = 0.76$)
2. Public relations coursework ($M = 3.97, SD = 0.82$)
3. Internship or work experience ($M = 3.83, SD = 0.86$)
4. Campus involvement ($M = 3.48, SD = 0.82$)
5. Liberal arts coursework ($M = 3.46, SD = 1.01$)

According to the practitioners who participated in the survey, there were five least found characteristics/experiences:

1. Certificate in public relations ($M = 1.64, SD = 0.86$)
2. Certifications (e.g., Hootsuite, Google Analytics, coding) ($M = 1.91, SD = 0.89$)

3. Bi- or multi-lingual ($M = 2.00, SD = 0.84$)
4. Study abroad experience ($M = 2.33, SD = 0.92$)
5. Participation in an on-campus student PR agency ($M = 2.46, SD = 0.98$)

Public Relations Curriculum

This study sought to identify the implementation of the 2006 CPRE five-course recommendation and determine any needed changes to this standard. Overall, 90% of academic respondents ($n = 178$) and 95% of practitioner respondents ($n = 395$) were in favor of retaining the five-course standard. As Table 4 shows, the 2016 study found that practitioner respondents favored programs requiring all five courses.

Importantly, 99% of academic respondents said they have an Introduction to Public Relations or principles class ($n = 198$), 93% said this course is required ($n = 185$), and 87% said what they offer is a public relations specific class ($n = 173$). Most academics also indicated that a research methods course is taught (97.0%, $n = 196$) and required (89.9%, $n = 178$), but many indicated that it is not a public relations specific course that is offered in their program (47.0%, $n = 93$). Writing was also a course that most respondents said is included (97.0%, $n = 195$), required (93.4%, $n = 184$), and public relations specific (82.7%, $n = 163$). Campaigns and case studies courses are also taught (92.5%, $n = 186$), required (80.1%, $n = 157$), and public relations specific (82.2%, $n = 162$). A course for internships was also offered at universities for 91% of respondents ($n = 183$), but only 45% said it was a required course ($n = 89$); 58% said the internship course is public relations specific ($n = 113$).

Curriculum Topics

In addition to the five-course standard, many public relations programs offer courses on additional topics and/or include topics within existing courses. Over the years, the list of possible curriculum topics has changed, resulting in two new topics in the 2006 study and 32 new topics

in the 2016 study (see Table 5). Unfortunately, comparisons between the years is made complex due to a change from the 7-point scale used in 1998 and 2006 to the 5-point response metric used in this study; therefore, only the 2016 findings for the individual outcomes are discussed. For the 2016 mean responses, the curriculum topics rated as a 4.00 or higher are highlighted, indicating an essential topic. Educators indicated a high importance for 15 curriculum topics while practitioners identified 13 (mean ratings of a 4.0 or higher). Eleven highly essential curriculum topics were the same for educators and practitioners.

	2006		2016	
	Desired <i>M (SD)</i>	Found <i>M (SD)</i>	Desired <i>M (SD)</i>	Found <i>M (SD)</i>
Active in PR organizations (PRSSA, IABC, etc)***	N/A	N/A	3.53 (1.15)	2.80 (0.90)
Active in student media (student newspaper, radio station, etc)***	3.55 (1.07)	3.10 (0.87)	3.75 (0.96)	2.85 (0.85)
Active on social media***	N/A	N/A	3.86 (0.97)	4.40 (0.76)
Bi- or multi-lingual***	N/A	N/A	3.17 (1.22)	2.00 (0.84)
Business coursework	N/A	N/A	3.87 (0.95)	2.51 (0.93)
Campus involvement***	N/A	N/A	3.37 (1.06)	3.48 (0.82)
Caliber of university attended***	N/A	N/A	3.02 (1.07)	3.00 (0.69)
Certificate in Principles of Public Relations***	N/A	N/A	2.38 (1.18)	1.64 (0.86)
Certifications (Hootsuite, Google Analytics, coding, etc.)***	N/A	N/A	2.88 (1.19)	1.91 (0.89)
Degree in PR***	N/A	N/A	3.54 (1.20)	3.27 (0.95)
Diverse / Multicultural perspective***	N/A	N/A	3.80 (0.99)	2.81 (0.83)
Diversity of the candidate***	N/A	N/A	3.49 (1.05)	2.65 (0.83)
Hard copy portfolio**	3.62 (1.06)	2.91 (0.79)	3.35 (1.19)	2.91 (1.09)
High GPA***	N/A	N/A	3.22 (1.02)	3.22 (0.66)
Internship or work experience***	4.01 (1.00)	3.35 (0.82)	4.67 (0.71)	3.83 (0.86)
Interest in culture (film, books, art, politics, etc)***	3.31 (1.02)	3.17 (0.80)	3.30 (1.05)	2.96 (0.89)
Leadership experience	N/A	N/A	3.98 (0.96)	2.78 (0.86)
Liberal arts coursework	3.58 (1.04)	3.42 (0.89)	3.27 (1.11)	3.46 (1.01)
Online portfolio***	N/A	N/A	3.50 (1.13)	2.79 (1.00)
Participation in on-campus student PR agency*	N/A	N/A	3.65 (1.08)	2.46 (0.98)
Public relations coursework**	N/A	N/A	4.47 (0.83)	3.97 (0.82)
Strong references*	4.01 (1.05)	3.52 (0.87)	4.22 (0.92)	3.36 (0.80)
Study abroad experience***	N/A	N/A	2.39 (1.12)	2.33 (0.92)
Up-to-date with current professional trends and issues*	N/A	N/A	4.10 (0.92)	2.80 (0.85)
Volunteer work***	N/A	N/A	3.45 (1.00)	2.99 (0.89)
Writing performance***	N/A	N/A	4.88 (0.40)	2.90 (0.86)

(* = $p \leq 0.5$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$ for 2016 desired and found)
(Highlighting = highly desired or found)

When it came to the most important curriculum topics, educators most often selected: (1) measurement and evaluation ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.75$); (2) social media ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.80$); (3) campaign management ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.76$); (4) strategic communications ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.80$); and (5) audience segmentation ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.97$). Practitioners believed the top five curriculum topics to be: (1) content creation ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.69$); (2) strategic communications ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.78$); (3) social media ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.77$); (4) measurement and evaluation ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.79$); and (5) publicity/media relations ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.79$).

Most of the items in Table 5 did not have significant differences between the educator and practitioner rankings for the essentialness of each topic. However, educators believed audience segmentation, campaign management, CSR, crisis management, fundraising, issues management, measurement and evaluation, and political communication were all more essential than practitioners did. The practitioners felt that business-to-consumer PR and content creation were more essential than educators thought.

	Educators			Practitioners
	Is it taught?	Is it required?	Is it PR specific?	Should it be required?
Introduction to Public Relations / Principles	98.5% ($n=198$)	93.4% ($n=185$)	87.4% ($n=173$)	94.8% ($n=398$)
Research Methods	97.0% ($n=196$)	89.9% ($n=178$)	47.0% ($n=93$)	94.5% ($n=396$)
Writing	97.0% ($n=195$)	93.4% ($n=184$)	82.7% ($n=163$)	99.8% ($n=419$)
Campaigns & Case Studies	92.5% ($n=186$)	80.1% ($n=157$)	82.2% ($n=162$)	97.9% ($n=410$)
Supervised Experience (Internship)	91.0% ($n=183$)	45.2% ($n=89$)	57.7% ($n=113$)	93.1% ($n=390$)

Online Education

Overall, 53% of educators who participated in this survey indicated that their program offers online public relations courses ($n = 102$). Six percent of the educators said their program had a completely online undergraduate degree ($n = 11$). Both educators and practitioners indicated

Table 5: Curriculum Topics							
	1998	2006			2016		
	Total <i>M (SD)</i>	Total <i>M (SD)</i>	Educators <i>M (SD)</i>	Practitioners <i>M (SD)</i>	Total <i>M (SD)</i>	Educators <i>M (SD)</i>	Practitioners <i>M (SD)</i>
Audience segmentation **	6.37 (0.95)	6.41 (0.94)	6.17 (1.03)	6.60 (0.83)	3.89 (1.03)	4.26 (0.97)	3.72 (1.12)
Brand management	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.86 (1.02)	3.76 (1.02)	3.92 (1.02)
Business to business PR	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.57 (0.98)	3.30 (0.97)	3.70 (0.97)
Business to consumer PR *	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.93 (0.91)	3.78 (0.94)	4.01 (0.89)
Campaign management *	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.30 (0.83)	4.54 (0.76)	4.19 (0.84)
Case studies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.10 (0.92)	4.11 (1.00)	4.10 (0.88)
Client management	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.87 (0.96)	3.77 (0.98)	3.91 (0.94)
Community relations	6.03 (1.06)	6.15 (1.02)	5.99 (1.15)	6.28 (0.90)	3.89 (0.91)	3.96 (0.92)	3.85 (0.91)
Content creation *	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.50 (0.71)	4.44 (0.76)	4.52 (0.69)
Content marketing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.85 (1.02)	3.56 (1.04)	3.99 (0.98)
Corporate communications	5.62 (1.39)	5.62 (1.27)	5.68 (1.29)	5.58 (1.25)	3.95 (0.90)	3.96 (0.95)	3.95 (0.88)
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) **	N/A	6.35 (0.96)	6.17 (1.05)	6.49 (0.87)	3.75 (0.93)	4.06 (0.87)	3.60 (0.92)
Crisis management *	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.96 (0.97)	4.07 (0.90)	3.91 (1.01)
Data analytics	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.01 (0.95)	4.18 (0.93)	3.94 (0.94)
Digital technologies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.14 (0.87)	4.19 (0.90)	4.11 (0.86)
Diversity-focused/advocacy comm	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.49 (0.98)	3.74 (0.99)	3.37 (0.95)
Employee relations/internal comm	6.15 (1.05)	5.97 (1.36)	5.86 (1.13)	6.05 (1.13)	3.72 (0.99)	3.73 (1.02)	3.72 (0.98)
Entertainment communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.45 (0.95)	2.52 (0.92)	2.42 (0.97)
Event management	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.70 (0.99)	3.27 (1.08)	2.60 (0.98)
Environmental communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.32 (1.08)	2.91 (0.98)	3.35 (1.08)
Financial/investor relations	5.18 (1.30)	5.27 (1.28)	5.16 (1.35)	5.35 (1.21)	3.00 (1.08)	3.12 (1.07)	2.95 (1.09)
Fundraising/membership development *	5.13 (1.35)	5.18 (1.32)	4.83 (1.41)	5.45 (1.18)	2.81 (1.05)	3.04 (0.99)	2.70 (1.07)
Government relations	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.13 (1.03)	3.24 (1.02)	3.07 (1.03)
Healthcare communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.74 (0.96)	2.89 (0.92)	2.68 (0.97)
Integrated communications	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.07 (0.94)	4.00 (1.02)	4.10 (0.90)
International communication	5.29 (1.38)	5.37 (1.39)	4.95 (1.47)	5.70 (1.24)	3.16 (1.04)	3.52 (0.92)	2.99 (1.05)
Issues management *	5.94 (1.09)	6.15 (0.99)	6.05 (1.00)	6.23 (0.98)	3.90 (0.94)	3.97 (0.88)	3.87 (0.96)
Law/ethics	6.06 (1.16)	6.26 (1.02)	6.18 (1.19)	6.32 (0.87)	4.15 (0.93)	4.40 (0.82)	4.03 (0.96)
Measurement and evaluation *	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.47 (0.78)	4.60 (0.75)	4.41 (0.79)
Nonprofit communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.95 (1.03)	3.18 (0.95)	2.84 (1.05)
Political communication *	4.97 (1.42)	4.94 (1.33)	5.10 (1.34)	4.81 (1.31)	2.78 (0.98)	2.99 (0.95)	2.67 (0.98)
Project management	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.14 (0.91)	3.91 (0.95)	4.25 (0.86)
Public affairs/lobbying	5.27 (1.28)	5.25 (1.23)	5.09 (1.34)	5.38 (1.12)	2.79 (1.00)	2.90 (0.99)	2.74 (1.01)
Public diplomacy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.70 (1.07)	2.76 (0.98)	2.68 (1.11)
Publicity/media relations	6.35 (0.94)	6.40 (1.00)	6.44 (0.99)	6.37 (1.01)	4.35 (0.82)	4.25 (0.88)	4.40 (0.79)
Reputation management	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.25 (0.83)	4.25 (0.78)	4.25 (0.85)
Risk management	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.59 (1.05)	3.59 (1.03)	3.58 (1.06)
Social advocacy/activism	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.06 (1.03)	3.30 (1.00)	2.94 (1.02)
Social media	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.51 (0.78)	4.58 (0.80)	4.47 (0.77)
Sports communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.38 (0.94)	2.55 (0.92)	2.30 (0.95)
Strategic communications	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.49 (0.78)	4.52 (0.80)	4.48 (0.78)
Technology communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.10 (1.12)	3.28 (1.06)	3.01 (1.14)
Travel/tourism communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.41 (0.94)	2.52 (0.92)	2.37 (0.95)
Visual communication	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.79 (1.00)	3.81 (0.96)	3.79 (1.02)

Note: The sales in 1998 and 2006 were 1–7 but in 2016 the scale was 1–5

(* = $p \leq 0.5$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$ for 2016 desired and found) (Highlighting = high importance)

program handled internships, 42% said they required an internship ($n = 80$), 51% had programs that allowed elective credits for an internship ($n = 97$), and 6% just encouraged internships ($n = 12$) (see Table 7). Most programs had an internship coordinator (82.1%, $n = 156$) and 69% of respondents said that coordinator was a faculty member ($n = 121$).

Only 35% of educators said their program had a training program to prepare students for internships ($n = 66$), and the most common assessment of internships was a performance review by the supervisor (63.6%, $n = 147$). Plus, 45% said that to complete an internship for credit, their program required a prerequisite course ($n = 103$), 46% have minimum credit hours required ($n = 107$), and 36% have a minimum GPA ($n = 83$). Many required all three. Overall, 32% of practitioners said their interns were not paid ($n = 124$). The average pay reported for those who were paid was \$13.54 an hour.

The Department of Labor's Federal Guidelines on Internships based on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) provides important guidance on internships; however, 36% of educators ($n = 66$) and 29% of practitioners ($n = 111$) were not familiar with the guidelines. Overall, of those who were familiar with the guidelines and knew how internships were handled in their area, only 67% of educators ($n = 62$) and 93% of practitioners ($n = 244$) said these guidelines are always followed.

Table 6: Online Public Relations Undergraduate Education		
	Educators <i>M (SD)</i>	Practitioners <i>M (SD)</i>
The overall quality of an online PR degree is equal to a traditional face-to-face PR degree. *	2.27 (1.21)	2.35 (1.11)
Job applicants should disclose if <u>all</u> their degree coursework has been taken online. *	3.80 (1.40)	3.90 (1.38)
Job applicants should disclose if <u>part</u> of their degree coursework has been taken online.	3.30 (1.37)	3.19 (1.42)

(* = $p \leq 0.5$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$)

There were significant differences between educator and practitioner views about interns having a valuable experience (see Table 8). Educators felt more positive about the experience; however, practitioners indicated higher agreement that interns were given meaningful work and that they receive clear and routine instructions.

Table 7: Internships		
	Educators	Practitioners
Desired		99.8% (n=414)
Required	42.3% (n=80)	
Elective	51.3% (n=97)	
Encouraged	6.3% (n=12)	
Have a training program to prepare students for internship	34.7% (n=66)	
Academic unit has an internship coordinator	82.1% (n=156)	
Internship coordinator is a faculty member	68.8% (n=121)	
Internship Requirements		
Prerequisite course	44.6% (n=103)	
Minimum completed credit hours	46.3% (n=107)	
Minimum GPA	35.9% (n=83)	
All (prereq, credit hours, GPA)	17% (n=53)	
Internship Assessment		
Performance review by intern	49.5% (n=115)	
Performance review by supervisor	63.6% (n=147)	
Term paper or report from intern	43.3% (n=100)	
Record of daily activities	21.2% (n=49)	
Weekly reports from intern and supervisor	27.3% (n=63)	
Final examination	1.3% (n=3)	
Determined by each professor/advisor	11.7% (n=27)	
Follow the Department of Labor's Federal Guidelines on Internships based on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) always.	66.7% (n=62)	92.9% (n=244)
Don't know what the Department of Labor's Federal Guidelines on Internships based on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) are.	35.5% (n=66)	28.6% (n=111)

Membership in Student Associations

Both educators and practitioners found high value in student involvement in associations such as Public Relations Student Society of America and International Association of Business Communicators (see Table 9). They each identified networking as the number one reason for participating in student associations

Faculty Qualifications

As Table 10 shows, educators and practitioners ranked staying up-to-date on technology as the top faculty qualification ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.69$ and $M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.65$). Educators preferred more than 5 years of professional PR experience ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.03$), while practitioners ranked more than 10 years of professional PR experience as more important ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.69$). Similarly, educators rated presenting at academic conferences ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.04$) as more important than professional conferences ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.99$), whereas practitioners found the opposite to be more important.

Implications

Taking a good look at public relations undergraduate education on a periodic basis is an extremely valuable, though daunting, task. The value that academics and practitioners can derive from the CPRE reports highlight consistencies, gaps, and opportunities.

Table 8: Internship Outcomes		
	Educators <i>M (SD)</i>	Practitioners <i>M (SD)</i>
Interns have valuable internship experiences**	4.11 (1.44)	3.83 (1.60)
Interns are often given meaningful work*	3.85 (1.39)	3.87 (1.58)
Interns often work on projects that have measurable outcomes	3.28 (1.64)	3.65 (1.62)
The work interns perform is valued	3.90 (1.47)	3.92 (1.58)
Interns are matched to supervisors with experience in the field	2.83 (1.80)	3.44 (1.79)
Students with diverse backgrounds are encouraged to apply***	2.68 (2.00)	3.81 (1.75)
Interns receive clear and routine instructions**	2.76 (1.85)	3.49 (1.68)

(* = $p \leq 0.5$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$)

(Highlighting = high agreement)

Consistencies and Gaps

The secret to the success of undergraduate education is collaboration between educators and practitioners. Together they can provide the foundation for a cohesive focus on knowledge, skills, and abilities to prepare undergraduate students for their future careers. While both educators and practitioners identified ethics as the top knowledge

	Educators <i>M (SD)</i>	Practitioners <i>M (SD)</i>
Networking*	4.51 (0.88)	4.47 (0.82)
Internships**	3.95 (1.08)	4.36 (0.85)
Career counseling / jobs	4.06 (1.00)	4.13 (0.89)
Knowledge or professional issues / trends	4.31 (0.84)	4.23 (0.95)
Mentoring	4.00 (1.05)	4.23 (0.89)
Multicultural perspective	3.37 (1.11)	3.44 (1.05)
Professional development	4.26 (0.94)	4.27 (0.81)

(* = $p \leq 0.5$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$)

(Highlighting = high benefit)

topic, there were inconsistencies on the other top knowledge topic areas. Educators identified business acumen and cultural perspective to aid students in having a well-rounded business grounding. Practitioners, on the other hand, identified diversity and inclusion and social issues as core knowledge areas likely to aid graduates to assimilate into the current work environment. Importantly, practitioners identified ethics, diversity and inclusion, and social issues as their top found areas, but none were found at what would be considered a high level; this indicates more work needs to be done to prepare students for all three knowledge areas.

When assessing the desired skills, practitioners and educators were aligned. Writing is still the most valued skill. In fact, the desire for writing skills has increased since 2006, but the good news is that writing

	Educators		Professionals
	% Who Have	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Presents at academic research conferences	82.3 (n=144)	3.77 (1.04)	3.26 (1.08)
Presents at non-research professional conferences ***	76.9% (n=133)	3.47 (0.99)	3.53 (1.01)
Publishes peer-reviewed scholarship	78.9% (n=138)	3.78 (1.12)	3.29 (1.04)
Publishes trade scholarship ***	57.2% (n=99)	3.25 (0.99)	3.23 (1.01)
Has a Ph.D., Ed.D. or terminal degree	75.9 (n=132)	3.67 (1.22)	3.27 (1.12)
Is tenured or is tenure track	69.5 (n=121)	3.33 (1.39)	2.92 (1.12)
Has more than 5 years professional experience in PR ***	88.0% (n=154)	4.15 (1.03)	4.52 (0.75)
Has more than 10 years professional experience in PR ***	66.3% (n=116)	3.23 (1.27)	4.61 (0.69)
Is Accredited in PR (APR/APR+M)	35.4% (n=62)	2.72 (1.33)	3.73 (1.25)
Is an Accredited Business Communicator (ABC)	2.9% (n=5)	2.01 (1.09)	3.11 (1.12)
Has earned certifications (Adobe, Hootsuite, Google, etc.)	27.4% (n=48)	2.45 (1.17)	3.02 (1.21)
Is trained to teach online	66.9% (n=117)	3.01 (1.28)	3.12 (1.16)
Stays up-to-date on technology *	92.6% (n=162)	4.51 (0.69)	4.63 (0.65)

(* = $p \leq 0.5$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$)

(Highlighting = highly desired)

ability has also slightly increased. The other skills both groups identified were communication and social media management. Fortunately, all three of these skills were the highest ranked skills found, but none were frequently found, so there is still a need for continued and increased focus. Unfortunately, there was a gap between the perception of educators delivering writing and communication skills and practitioners identifying the skills as found.

Both groups included strategic communications, social media, and measurement and evaluation as top curriculum topics, but the practitioners identified content creation as their most important addition to the curriculum.

Practitioners and educators identified creative thinking, problem solving, and critical thinking as the top desired and found abilities (while in slightly different order for the groups). Analytical thinking was not as highly rated by either, and there was a big gap with educators identifying higher levels of delivery of abilities than indications of the abilities being found by practitioners.

Opportunities

While the overwhelming majority of educators and practitioners in this study was in favor of retaining the CPRE five-course standard, some programs do not have these five courses specific to public relations. This is a missed opportunity; for example, 17% of educator respondents said their writing course is not a public relations writing course. Given how important writing continues to be, having a public relations writing course along with multiple other grammar and writing courses would be ideal. This is especially true considering this research found that writing remains the core entry-level skill and hiring characteristic.

In 2018, the CPRE published the global data from the 2016 omnibus survey reported in *Fast forward: Foundations + Future state. Educators + Practitioners*. In this report, the Commission recommended adding ethics as a sixth course to the standard. By recommending ethics as a required course, programs will be able to improve their focus on ethics and better meet the needs of this dynamic field.

As the profession becomes more integrated and entry-level positions continue to advertise positions looking for a bachelor's degree in a "relevant field," seeing public relations coursework as the third desired hiring characteristic is telling. The core competencies students learn in public relations programs are valuable and sought after. This should lead academic programs to question the value of combining advertising and public relations. Consistently, this research found support for core public relations competencies.

It is concerning to see the percentage of paid internships remains low, yet internship or work experience is highly regarded. There has been a strong call to action from academics and practitioners across the United States to pay student interns. Additionally, internships should be supervised and considered a learning opportunity for the student.

In addition to the content shared in this article, the full 2017 CPRE report *Fast forward: Foundations + Future state. Educators + Practitioners* contains 17 chapters with global recommendations.

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Ethics Education in Public Relations: State of Student Preparation and Agency Training in Ethical Decision-Making

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As new public relations professionals move out of the classroom and into the work world, they face a range of ethical challenges in their positions. This study investigated how public relations agencies perceive the preparation of new college graduates to handle ethical situations and how agencies train new employees for ethical communication and behavior, shedding light on gaps in ethical education. Findings offer useful information for faculty and practitioners who wish to improve young people's preparation to address ethical dilemmas.

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After conducting an extensive survey of practitioners and academics in the public relations field, the Commission on Public Relations Education (2017) issued its report, “Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State, Educators and Practitioners,” and made an important recommendation. It called for public relations programs at colleges and universities to add a required ethics course to the public relations curriculum (Commission, 2017). The report argues that communication ethics have never been more important than they are today, given the increasing level of complexity in the digital world and the challenge of fake news and misinformation in the public sphere (Commission, 2017). Ethical behavior among public relations professionals is critical for continuing to build the reputation of the field. What the report does not address is how current public relations education prepares (or fails to prepare) young professionals to face ethical issues in the workforce and how training on ethics continues into a student’s first job. The current article helps address those topics by presenting the results of interviews with public relations agency leaders who identify gaps between ethical preparation and agency needs and offer insights into how agencies are continuing to educate young practitioners about ethical issues.

Ethics Education

Ethics education prepares students to address ethical dilemmas. In his seminal piece, Plaisance (2006) summarized what the best ethics education looks like. He wrote that it focuses on “students’ analytical abilities and critical thinking about stakeholders so that they can effectively deliberate through an ethical problem” (p. 380); it is focused on “the quality of this deliberation rather than on distribution of ‘right answers’” (p. 380); it focuses “students’ attention on how decisions in ethical quandaries are made rather than concentrating on what the decision turns out to be”; it emphasizes “the process of moral deliberation” (p. 380); and it helps “students develop their own moral reasoning skills,

grounded in philosophical concepts, and help increase their awareness of potential ethical issues” (p. 380).

In the public relations classroom, faculty work to apply these strategies while addressing professional topics. Recent work by Neill (2017) identified ethics topics that are taught in standalone public relations classes and across the curriculum in the public relations field. Overall, the most common ethics-related topics were Public Relations Society of America’s code of ethics (91%), corporate social responsibility (84%), current events (82%), media relations (65%), ethical decision-making models (60%), impact of organizational culture and values (60%), classical theories by philosophers (55%), other codes of ethics (other than PRSA) (54%), blogger/influencer relations (51%), global perspectives on ethics (46%), and how to raise ethical concerns/action plan (39%).

For years, educators have been calling for a greater focus on ethics in the public relations curriculum (Austin & Toth, 2011), suggesting that moral reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical skills should be prioritized in ethics education (Gale & Bunton, 2005). Case studies and group discussions were found to be the most effective methods in the public relations classroom (Silverman & Gower, 2014). However, more research is needed on the gaps between current instruction and expectations of new employees in the public relations field.

Developing skills in ethical decision-making does not end in the classroom, but rather it is a life-long pursuit, which means education should continue beyond the undergraduate curriculum and extend into the job setting.

Ethics Education in the Workforce

Research suggests a strong link between on-the-job ethics training and behavior (Gale & Bunton, 2005), and yet as few as 35% of public relations employees report on-the-job training (Neill, 2017). Historically, public relations agencies have provided very little training on ethics (Lee

& Cheng, 2012), but with new ethical issues arising in an environment of disinformation, public relations practitioners need to improve their preparation (Commission, 2017). Millennial practitioners welcome ethics training, particularly discussion using real-world case studies (Gallicano & Matthews, 2016).

Instilling integrity comes with three levels of on-the-job training: initial entry training, reinforcement education, and sustainment education (Hipple & Olson, 2011). This may be seen in the public relations agency by first introducing employees to the code of conduct of the business, then conducting training to reinforce ethical-decision making, and finally, making sure management is prepared to create a culture of ethical decision-making. In an organizational context, an ethical climate and ethical leadership can lead to stronger ethical decision-making among employees (Wimbush & Shepard, 1994) and better organizational citizenship behaviors (Hipple & Olson, 2011).

The current study explores two important questions related to ethics education:

RQ1: How well (if at all) do public relations agency leaders perceive new college graduates to be prepared to face ethical dilemmas on the job?

RQ2: How (if at all) are public relations agencies training new employees about ethical communication and behaviors?

Method

In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 leaders at top public relations agencies (see Table 1 for details). The interviews consisted of 15 questions (see Appendix A for sample questions), and each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Question topics included the preparation of new employees, training content, hours of ethics training, and recommendations for training.

Recruitment

The primary investigator identified training managers and/or ethics leaders in the top 40 public relations agencies as ranked by the Holmes Report (2016) and invited them to participate in this study. Potential participants were asked if they were the most appropriate person at the agency to answer questions about ethics training, and if not, the investigator was redirected to a more appropriate person.

Table 1: Position and gender of participants

Position	Gender
Agency CEO	Female
Vice President and Chief Ethics & Compliance Officer	Male
Vice President of Learning & Development	Male
Vice President	Female
Senior Vice President, Learning & Development	Male
Senior Vice President	Male
Executive Vice President, Global Talent	Female
President, US Region	Female
Senior Vice President	Male
Ethics Officer	Male
CEO and Managing Partner	Female
Senior Vice President	Female

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed word-for-word. Transcripts were coded both with pre-identified concepts of interest and with open codes. Iterative analysis of transcripts led to key themes and concepts. Below are the results of this analysis organized into key themes.

Results

Gaps in PR Ethics Education

The first research question asked about the degree to which new professionals were prepared to address ethical dilemmas in the public relations agency. Professionals generally thought new graduates were ethical and exhibited honesty, and as one interviewee said, “When it comes to truthful business transactions . . . and being accurate, I think they learn that stuff pretty well in school.” None of the interviewees suggested that new graduates were woefully unprepared to address ethical issues. In fact, interviewees felt that young professionals were more passionate about the ethics of organizations than earlier generations. According to interviewees, young professionals held the organization to a high standard and preferred to work for an organization that engages in ethical behaviors. One interviewee said:

They care more about ethics and integrity than they might have 10 years ago. There’s much more of an interest in wanting to work for a place that’s ethical; that culture matters in some ways more than money, whereas I think 10 years ago it was like, “OK, show me the money.”

When asked to identify specific gaps in new graduates’ preparation to face ethical challenges in public relations agencies, interviewees frequently pointed to four topics: digital ethics, ethical media relations, confidentiality, and raising ethical issues. Regarding the first topic, digital ethics, interviewees felt that young professionals needed more education on how writing professional social media content differs from creating personal social media post:

I’ll tell you that the biggest thing . . . that they don’t come prepared in is ethics in digitalcommunication, and disclosure. And that’s something that we have to teach them and say, “When you’re posting on behalf of a client, you need to say it’s on behalf of a

client or that it's a[n agency] client.”

This is not to suggest that new graduates lacked skills in digital communication, as the interviewee explained: “What’s interesting to me about that is . . . we’re bringing in people with incredible digital skills And yet we still [train on] ethics in digital communication that they lack or have not ever learned.”

The second significant gap, ethical media relations, emerged in several interviews as leaders felt younger employees lacked an understanding of how to ethically respond to media requests. Interviewees complained that new professionals had shared information that was unverified or unapproved, potentially misleading the media or putting their clients in a difficult position. New employees needed to better value accuracy in their media communication, according to leaders.

The third gap can be classified as confidentiality. Agency professionals found that new employees sometimes discussed agency or client information in their personal social media, violating client confidentiality. This topic came up several times, suggesting that it was a widespread misunderstanding on the part of new graduates.

And, finally, nearly all interviewees brought up the fact that new employees needed to raise ethical issues to management, and that is a place where learning occurs. A few cited instances when that happened:

We’ve had . . . younger employees who have enough smarts to say, “What about this?” or, “Let’s start to talk about it,” in which case, they really didn’t understand the ethics behind it.

Preparing them for this kind of action may be an area where faculty can make the most contribution to their students’ future ethical toolbox.

Ethics Education in the Public Relations Agency

The second research question asked about ongoing training in public relations agencies. Regarding hours, the agencies represented in this study consistently reported spending approximately 24 hours per year

on training, but ethics training consists of fewer than one of these hours. In other words, approximately two hours per month (for 12 months) is spent training employees on a job-related topic, but fewer than one hour per year is spent on ethics training. Because agency employees' hours are billable, more hours of training mean less revenue, and this creates a conflict for agencies. One interviewee described it this way:

The conundrum that we in the agency world face is that we make our money on billable hours. So, it's finding a happy medium where it's enough training so that you can obviously be developing your staff, and not so much that you're taking away from your billable hours. Require more [than 24 hours per year], and it doesn't get done.

Most interviewees expressed concern that more ethics training was not being done at the time of the interviews (most hoped to increase training in the future); however, a few agencies pointed to their culture of ethics as a reason for not needing training. They felt that the culture provided guidance for employees on what is acceptable. Agencies pointed out that accountability (management review of employee work) acted as an ethics check. They felt that employees rarely acted autonomously, so there was little room for unethical communication. However, they did not address the issue of preparing management to take on the role of creating an ethical culture and how this occurs without ethics training at the management level.

Ethics training often involved reviewing the code of ethics or a list of best practices during the hiring process. Some agencies followed this with other ethics training, but unfortunately not all, meaning that, for some agencies, the only ethics training provided to employees was a review of a code of conduct. Referring to the employee handbook, one interviewee said:

There are like two or three pages on ethics in there. And then in

terms of how I would teach it and have people learn, like if you're a new employee on my team, it's just learning through me handling it and us talking about it and me overly explaining things.

When asked about the topics of the ethics training, agencies that conduct training mentioned ethical decision-making and telling the truth. Others cited conflict of interest, transparency, and reports of unethical behavior. However, given the limited amount of time dedicated to ethics training, these were covered briefly, if at all. Reflecting on gaps in their ethics training, agency executives wished they could add additional topics, including diversity and inclusion and social media use. They believed that the most effective mode of training for ethical decision-making is through case studies and discussions (as supported in research by Silverman & Gower, 2014; Gallicano & Matthews, 2016), but leaders are hesitant to invest the time in this kind of training because of revenue sacrifices. Case studies that are highly relevant to practice were most effective, in their opinions, but few employed this kind of training.

Implications and Recommendations

This study offered insights into the way public relations agency executives perceive the preparation of new graduates to address ethical dilemmas, and it sheds light on the way agencies are continuing (or not continuing) ethics training on the job. The interviews suggested that new graduates come to agencies reasonably prepared to address entry-level ethical issues with several issues needing additional attention, particularly digital ethics, ethical media relations, confidentiality, and raising ethical issues. According to Neill (2017), some of these issues are covered in public relations programs, including media relations (65%) and raising ethical concerns/action plan (39%). This suggests that faculty understand the importance of these issues, but more attention is needed in all four areas to fully prepare students for work in public relations agencies.

Agency leaders do not feel they have time to conduct additional

ethics training, so employees learn on the job and absorb ethical lessons through the culture and through modeling. Agencies' reliance on their culture to educate employees skips important steps in the ethics education process; particularly, it leaves young people without foundational knowledge about ethics topics and leaves little space for safe deliberation and development of moral reasoning skills, as recommended by Plaisance (2006). The topics covered in agency training are limited, and, due to financial restraints, training rarely includes meaningful and time-consuming ethical discussions that are brought on by case studies. These findings lead to several important recommendations for public relations ethics education.

Recommendations for improving ethics education in the public relations classroom.

- Build digital ethics topics and topics related to confidentiality into the public relations curriculum. These topics were not among the most common topics covered by educators, as found by Neill (2017). Helping students understand the differences between personal and professional communication on social media, as well as learning what to disclose and to whom will prepare them for the professional environment.
- Strengthen the focus on understanding ethical media relations and raising ethical issues in the workplace. Neill (2017) noted that these topics are commonly taught in the PR classroom, yet young professionals need even more preparation in these areas. Students need better training in how to handle media in an ethical manner. Helping students build confidence in their ability to identify and raise ethical concerns will prepare them for the challenges they will face on the job.

Recommendations for improving ethics education in public relations agencies.

- Commit time to reinforcement and sustainment education. Few agencies conduct regular ethics training with their employees (after initial trainings). Instead, agencies rely on their culture to drive behavior, and they overlook the steps of reinforcing learning and sustaining learning. Ethical culture can lead to greater ethical decision-making among employees, but education is needed to build that culture.
- Embed case studies into ethics training. Most agencies indicated that their ethics training consisted either of a “list of best practices” or a review of the code of ethics. Ethical development comes through deliberation and perspective taking. This works best in the context of case study discussions (Plaisance, 2006; Silverman & Gower, 2014).
- Reinforce an ethical culture. Most agencies pointed to their culture as the best guide for new employees. Without training for management on ethics and ethical culture, it is unclear how an ethical culture is created or maintained. More research is needed in this area.

As young professionals launch their careers in public relations, they will face increasingly complex ethical issues. Faculty members’ and managers’ efforts to prepare them for these challenges not only protect young employees but also help protect agencies and the organizations they serve to avoid consequences brought on by ethical missteps. Filling the gap between current ethical education and expectations should be the responsibility of both faculty and professionals who train and educate new employees. This study offers recommendations that should help fill that gap.

This study has a number of limitations, including the small sample

size and the narrow list of questions from which the conclusions were drawn. Future research should explore the type of training conducted by agencies and trends that may be emerging in ethics training as new issues such as social media disinformation and fake news crises create more challenges for public relations professionals. The current study can act as a baseline for assessing the gaps between ethics preparation of new professionals and the current needs in the field.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Training in public relations agencies:

1. Does your agency offer training for employees? If so, does the training include ethics elements?
2. Tell me about your ethics training.
 - a. What topics are covered in your training?
 - b. At what stages do you offer ethics training? (New employee, annual, monthly, quarterly, training, promotions)
3. What are the most important ethics topics that employees need to understand?
4. If you could add training modules to your current program, what would you cover in them?

Preparation of new college graduates:

5. How prepared are new college graduates to address ethical dilemmas that come up at your firm?
6. What ethical gaps have you seen between preparation and needs of your firm?
7. What ethical topics are young employees most (and least) prepared to address?