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Journal of Public Relations Education

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Note from the Editor-in-Chief:

We are pleased to share Volume 6, Issue 1, which offers our readers three research articles, two teaching briefs and two book reviews. The articles cover a variety of topics: public diplomacy training around the world, a comparison of expectations for PR graduates made by practitioners at different levels in their careers, and suggestions for helping students increase their knowledge and confidence in using statistics. We believe you will gain both inspiration and guidance from the teaching briefs, as they explore multicultural training through writing assignments and building recognition of the connections within and across personal networks. Finally, the book reviews offer helpful insights into how these two books might fit into your classes.

The editorial team expanded in November 2019 to include Dr. Kelly Vibber. We are grateful to have her join us as Dr. Lucinda Austin transitions deeper into leadership within the AEJMC PR Division. Dr. Austin has been a great help these past 2 years and will be missed. I am thankful for this entire team, which invests countless hours into proofreading, formatting and preparing each issue. Their service to the field is greatly appreciated. I also want to express my gratitude to our reviewers who offer useful advice through the blind-review process and help us maintain a solid reputation. Thank you!

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Table of Contents

Research Articles

- 1-32 Training International Public Relations Teams: Active Learning in a Multinational Context
Bond Benton
- 33-57 Curriculum Rebuilding in Public Relations: Understanding what Early Career, Mid-Career, and Senior PR/ Communications Professionals Expect from PR Graduates
Arunima Krishna, Donald K. Wright, & Raymond L. Kotcher
- 58-84 Demystifying Data: A Constructivist Approach to Teaching Statistical Concepts Using SPSS
Lauren Bayliss

Teaching Briefs

- 85-98 Learning about Diversity Worldwide: How a Social Media Writing Assignment Provides Students with Multicultural Perspectives
Arhlene A. Flowers
- 99-112 Implementation of Active Learning Techniques in an Undergraduate Public Relations Course: Comparing Individual Social Networks and Brand Communities
Corrie A. Wilder

Book Reviews

- 113-116 *Public Relations Campaigns: An Integrated Approach*
Reviewed by Brandi Watkins
- 117-120 *Teach Social Media: A Plan for Creating a Course Your Students Will Love*
Reviewed by Natalie T. J. Tindall

Training International Public Relations Teams: Active Learning in a Multinational Context

Bond Benton, Montclair State University

From 2004-2014, the State Department conducted a series of trainings for local, non-United States staff tasked with public diplomacy projects. These projects focused on activities that would better tell the U.S. story to international audiences and highlight attractive aspects of U.S. culture to external constituencies. Given the applied nature of these projects, training organizers elected to use an active and applied learning approach for training design. Non-U.S. staff worked directly on real world public diplomacy projects as the primary focus of each training session. Training groups' composition included both homogeneous groups (with participants all from the same country) and heterogeneous groups (with participants coming from multiple countries). Measured training outcomes demonstrated the effectiveness of applied learning in this context and improved outcomes for heterogeneous groups. Implications for teaching public relations, public diplomacy, and training pedagogy are considered.

Keywords: State Department, strategic communication, experiential learning, training and development, public diplomacy, diversity

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Strategically communicating with an international constituency presents a challenge under the most ideal circumstances. Reaching an international audience primed to believe the message is imperialistic, hostile, dangerous, hateful, and untrustworthy (Sardar & Davis, 2002) presents a considerably more substantial obstacle. That, however, is the exact obstacle the United States State Department took on in efforts to improve U.S. perceptions in the world through improved public diplomacy. Public diplomacy relies on a multidisciplinary approach that integrates ideas from marketing, public relations, international relations, and cultural studies (Botan, 1997). Turning this approach into an actionable strategy necessarily relies on trained teams with knowledge of both the state they are representing and the constituencies they are addressing. In this case, the State Department was tasked with training teams to deliver key messages at consular and diplomatic posts throughout the world from 2004-2014. As this message would need local partners to navigate and adapt the approach to the conditions on the ground, teams were composed of non-U.S. citizens who work for the U.S. State Department. The unique focus of this training, coupled with the opportunity to study the impact of multinational training groups focused on public relations, provides an important contextual opportunity for research that has implications for both educators and public relations practitioners.

Literature Review

Public Diplomacy and the U.S. State Department

Public diplomacy is based on the idea that states have fundamentally attractive dimensions that can be leveraged in the creation of improved relationships with a variety of international stakeholders (Sevin et al., 2019). An improved national image can lead to greater trade opportunities, more tourism, better positioning in international negotiations, and a decrease in international acrimony, potentially

resulting in improved security and more favorable economic conditions. The public relations element of public diplomacy has been well-established. Dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, states have regularly attempted to win over the publics of other nations by highlighting cultural and political characteristics that might be viewed as attractive to an international audience. While writing about the public relations dimension of public diplomacy, Sun (2008) argues that “American soft power has great influence worldwide from Hollywood stars to Harvard education, and through Microsoft applications” (p. 167).

The positive association with the economic and cultural dimensions of a country, if nourished through a program of public diplomacy, can “maintain and enhance long-term political relationships at a profit for society, so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organizations involved are met” (Sun, 2008, p. 168). Positive perceptions of a state can then serve as a buttress against negative attitudes directed against that state (Nye, 2004). A corporate social responsibility corollary is the investment that companies make “in areas like cause-related marketing to improve their reputation and create goodwill among consumers in the host country” (Choi et al., 2016, p. 82). In fact, Signitzer and Coombs (1992) argue that “public relations and public diplomacy seek similar objectives and use similar tools” (p. 137). The challenge, however, of public diplomacy mirrors the challenges faced in international public relations, which are well documented by both practitioners and researchers. As Taylor and Brodowsky (2012) note:

For the past three decades, increasing numbers of firms, at an increasing rate, have adopted a global mindset. Growth, if not survival, depends upon making the right decisions with respect to the international environment. (p. 149)

Taylor and Brodowsky (2012) further explain “there is widespread acceptance of the fallacy that IMR [international marketing research]

can use the same approaches, theories, methods, and scales in different worldwide locations” (p. 150). The idea that a successful messaging approach in one location will work equally well in another has been regularly shown to be a dubious thesis (Cheon et al., 2007). To remedy the dangers of an insular and homogeneous perspective in international messaging, the State Department regularly draws upon the perspectives of non-U.S. citizens employed by the organization when conducting public diplomacy. Non-U.S. citizens working at State Department posts comprise the bulk of the 42,000 staff members who work at more than 250 U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide. The term used in State Department literature describes them as the “glue” that holds U.S. diplomatic posts together (Bureau of Human Resources, 2007). As the “glue” of the organization, these international employees offer logistical bridges between the diplomatic post and region as many U.S. staff do not have the local cultural or language experience to create functioning programs in their posted countries (Asthana, 2006). Officials from the United States are assigned to a post for three years or less (and often for a much shorter duration than that). The job of U.S. diplomats posted overseas mirrors the expectations that many organizations face when operating internationally. They need to be sensitive to the needs of the local population, while ensuring the policies they enact match the overall vision Washington has for diplomacy. This need for adaptation to stakeholder needs while maintaining message consistency is echoed in literature defining the linkages between public diplomacy and public relations. In Vanc and Fitzpatrick’s (2016) analysis of public relations scholarship on the subject of public diplomacy from 1990 to 2014, they note that “studies examining the strategic aspects of public diplomacy, including works on media and messaging, revealed both commonalities in the two fields” (p. 436).

In terms of public diplomacy, the United States’ agenda is broadly to win the “hearts and minds” of people throughout the world.

This became an acutely difficult objective to achieve in the early 2000s when worldwide public opinion against the United States was sharply negative in the context of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The extent of those negative attitudes was crystallized in a study issued by the U.S. State Department, which was delivered to the House Appropriations Committee in 2003:

The bottom has indeed fallen out of support for the United States. In Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, only 15 percent view the United States favorably, compared with 61 percent in early 2002. In Saudi Arabia, according to a Gallup poll, only 7 percent had a “very favorable” view of the U.S. while 49 percent had a “very unfavorable” view. In Turkey, a secular Muslim, non-Arab democracy that is a stalwart member of NATO and a longtime supporter of America, favorable opinion toward the U.S. dropped from 52 percent three years ago to 15 percent in the spring of 2003, according to the Pew Research Center. The problem is not limited to the Arab and Muslim world. In Spain, an early ally in the war in Iraq, 3 percent had a very favorable view of the United States while 39 percent had a very unfavorable view. (Djerejian, 2003, p. 19)

The longevity of these negative feelings was further validated in both academic and popular research. For example, Bellamy and Weinberg (2008) noted that over a five-year span in the 2000s, the percentage of people with a favorable image of the United States decreased 11% in Japan, 18% in Argentina, 30% in Germany, and only reached 51% in the U.K. (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2008, p. 55). Such low numbers represented a diplomatic liability extreme enough that popular sentiment against the United States could be a hindrance in conducting foreign policy. Thus, the call to speak to the needs of key global stakeholders in appropriate

language and substance was paramount. The leveraging of opportunities created by the U.S. State Department's sizable non-U.S. citizen workforce would necessarily need to be a key component of any such initiative. With this in mind, the State Department issued an open solicitation to create a training program for its staff of non-U.S. citizens in 2004. This multi-year training program would focus on developing strategies for localized programs and presentations that highlight attractive aspects of United States culture to key international publics.

In this context, the key role of non-U.S. staff would be that of an enabler and intercessory. Their primary approach to communicating U.S. messages to local populations must be consistent with Washington's goals but adapted to match the needs of local targets. Managing messages and evaluating locally appropriate channels are the key components of their work. The term "engagement" has gained much traction as a public relations concept as the idea that "stakeholders challenge the discourse of organizational primacy and organizations prioritize the need for authentic stakeholder involvement" (Johnston, 2014, p. 381). This emphasis on dialogue, where the motivations of local constituencies are reciprocal in messaging, mirrors much of the literature about the goals governmental organizations have when initiating public diplomacy (Leonard et al., 2002; Nye, 1990, 2002b, 2002a, 2004, 2008, 2009). While such activities may appear insignificant in something as massive as a state's foreign policy program, the relationships built with publics in foreign countries can have a significant overall effect on the perceptions of that country. International staff working for the U.S. State Department can improve local constituency access in a number of ways. These include access to the local media channels, links to relevant programs and publics in the community, an understanding of local and regional government processes, and the skills to conduct research in a culturally appropriate and effective way. These international partners also have credibility in helping to share

the American messages in a way more likely to be accepted in the region.

While the opportunities provided by local resources are clear in any public relations strategy, efforts at effective public diplomacy have been sharply criticized for their failure to adapt to the needs of various international constituencies. Undoubtedly, some of the shortcomings are circumstantial. U.S. foreign policy decisions are frequently not well received by a number of publics worldwide. As the old saying goes, you can't PR your way out of a product people hate. Echoing this sentiment, an internal study commissioned by the State Department (Djerejian, 2003) argued:

We must underscore the common ground in both our values and policies. We have failed to listen and failed to persuade. We have not taken the time to understand our audience, and we have not bothered to help them understand us. We cannot afford such shortcomings. (p. 24)

Given the constraints of the short posting periods for U.S. officials, it is not feasible for them to form the partnerships essential to key public relations tasks. As such, the bulk of stakeholder relationship building is contingent on the work of local, non-U.S. staff. This creates organizational tension, as message creation is clearly under the domain of U.S. State Department employees, but adaptation and delivery of the message is sourced to local teams. This tendency has been identified in the Ethnocentric, Polycentric, Regiocentric, and Geocentric (E.P.R.G.) schema, which demonstrates that organizations engaging with international constituencies will typically have a reflexive tendency to contextualize the processes of the country they are operating in with the processes of their home country (Mahmoud, 1975). Wind et al. (1973) describe this as the "ethnocentric phase" (p. 14) of international messaging. Moving beyond this phase is particularly challenging, as Molleda et al. (2015) note that "organizations with operations in more than

one country are confronted with differences in geography, culture, politics, economy, communication, and demands for transparency that make finding an appropriate balance difficult” (p. 335).

While many modern international operations have moved beyond this phase, State Department culture tends to be considerably more traditional and remains grounded in U.S. organizational preferences. The State Department is hardly alone in this tendency as multinationals regularly emphasize their home countries’ cultures. As Samaha et al. (2014) indicate, “Despite the increase in international relationships, managers and academics have little guidance regarding whether or how strategies should be adapted in different countries” (p. 78). This is reflected in substantial public relations literature that suggests the field remains quite homogeneous despite the increasing need for messaging to diverse audiences (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). U.S. models and preferences still dominate public relations practice even in a global context (Freitag & Stokes, 2009). Diversification of the perspectives of public relations should be embedded in education and training, but shortcomings in this area remain. As Sriramesh (2002) succinctly states:

Public relations (PR) education has not kept pace with the rapid globalization The existing PR body of knowledge, and PR curricula around the world, have a US bias. In order to prepare PR students in various parts of the world to become effective multicultural professionals it is essential for experiences and perspectives from other continents to be integrated into PR education. (p. 54)

For the State Department, some of this inward focus is institutional, but much of it is structural as well. The focus of the organization is ensuring that its staff remains on message in terms of mandates coming from a central leadership. At the same time, however, for messages to gain currency with targeted stakeholders, the message must be localized by

teams of people who are not from the United States. Verčič et al. (2015) argue for improved training for international public relations teams by companies, which:

have to establish international training initiatives for communicators as well as an international selection process for communication staff, encourage international exchange of best practices and creative approaches, in corporate communications between countries, regions, as well as divisions and functions, and establish a visible international communication performance within the company. (p. 791)

Adult Learning and Public Relations Training

Active and experiential learning in public relations, marketing, and strategic communication training has been recognized as fundamental for successful outcomes (Alam, 2014; Bove & Davies, 2009; Craciun & Corrigan, 2010; Laverie et al., 2008). This need is seen in trainees at all levels but appears to be particularly salient in the case of adult learners. Specifically, prior research on adult learners has shown a preference for immediacy and the opportunity to have training sessions directly inform work in which they are currently engaged (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). While learners in traditional college classrooms might be more willing to see learning as exploratory towards an eventual professional outcome, most professionals in a training session do not have the luxury of time. Additionally, adult learners typically bring professional experience to the training environment and look to utilize existing skills and prior knowledge in learning activities (Luke, 1971). While courses geared to university students frequently emphasize making challenging concepts accessible, the accessibility of adult learning frequently comes from contextualizing new knowledge with previous experience. Content ownership is important in training working adults, as participants want to feel a sense of authorship in the material that emerges from the

training session (American Management Association, 1993). While periods of extended reflection and reinforcement are features of the university classroom, adult learners generally prefer action items they can immediately apply and refine through implementation in professional activities. The importance of this approach for a population engaged in international public relations practice becomes clear when considering many of the key challenges of the field.

Consistently, the most pedagogically sound way to navigate these challenges has been through active engagement and application activities on the part of training participants (American Management Association, 1993; Knowles et al., 1998; Luke, 1971). Contextual reflection and differentiation appear to be the most successful approaches to encouraging learners to consider different ideas related to international climates and the corresponding challenges related to culture that may emerge. While important theoretical lessons might be imparted through traditional lectures, the decision-making required to apply those principles requires dialogue, reflection, application, and activity (Hollensen, 2011). In a global context, diversity would appear to support these sorts of active learning outcomes. Multinational learning groups have been found to stimulate curiosity and foster a creative climate of collaboration among participants (Boehm et al., 2010; Fine-Davis & Faas, 2014). Specifically, culturally heterogeneous groups appear to have advantages over homogeneous groups in that they tend to foster less insular thinking and encourage consideration of new perspectives (Jacobi, 2018; Tyran, 2017). Diversity in training groups is seen as a particularly salient need for public relations (Verčič et al., 2015).

Given the State Department's need for effective public diplomacy training and the specific needs of adult learners, the following research question emerged:

RQ1: What is the effect of active and experiential public relations training

among non-U.S. citizens working for the U.S. State Department?

As cultural diversity would seem to support effective active and experiential learning, investigating diversity in training group composition begs the following research question:

RQ2: What are the differences in training outcomes between culturally homogeneous groups and culturally heterogeneous groups of non-U.S. citizens engaged in public relations training for the U.S. State Department?

Method

Case Context

The situation the State Department faced in terms of global attitudes toward the United States presented an obstacle with non-U.S. staff serving as an opportunity for shifting the worldwide narrative toward attractive aspects of U.S. culture. As an organization, tensions existed between the necessity for message consistency and the need for localization of communication. Navigation of that tension to ensure the preferences of different global publics were respected was the responsibility of non-U.S. staff working within the institution. Moving the needle in terms of worldwide opinion of the United States was a key objective that would require creative, compelling, and well-researched communication tactics. To ensure that non-U.S. staff would be empowered to develop those tactics, effective staff training was a crucial component of this initiative.

Training Approach

With world attitudes towards the United States being an important focal point of the institution, the U.S. State Department made improving the communication skills of its international staff an area of emphasis. With that in mind, the 2004 solicitation issued by the State Department focused on skills-based training that would improve the ability of non-U.S. staff to define the attributes of local stakeholders and tailor the messages to appeal to local preferences. These local staff were tasked with creating

a positive image of the United States in their countries in the hopes of accruing a range of public diplomacy benefits. As public diplomacy is intrinsically connected to public relations (Corman et al., 2008), consideration of effective public relations teaching methods was top of mind when constructing the training program for the local staff. Training these teams to ensure they could deliver a consistent message with appropriate localization was clearly a key component of this initiative. Given the distinct population associated with these trainings and the outcomes sought, a unique context for teaching public relations emerged.

In reviewing the mandates and circumstances outlined in the solicitation, it was clear that an approach emphasizing active and applied learning would be crucial for successfully training this population. In response to these exigencies, an approach focused on application-based learning of public relations principles served as a foundational direction in the proposal. The State Department found this approach to be most salient, and the proposal was accepted. As such, this case presented opportunities to test the viability of an applied experiential approach to public relations training in an international context.

Training Structure

Based on both the existing research and the needs of this specific group of adult learners, the training structure emphasized application-based active learning that leveraged the participants' experience. This approach was operationalized in the proposal in several key ways. First, project-based scenarios tailored to the learners' immediate needs would be built. Rather than teaching general theories and concepts related to public relations, participants would be tasked with assessing the values, interests, needs, and preferences of the countries in which they were working. They would also need to identify their organization's overall objectives in the region and begin preliminary work on a strategy and set of tactics that would best meet those objectives. The character of the training would then

turn those ideas into direct action plans with ideas for implementation. Thus, the training sessions would move away from lectures and speeches and would take on the character of a workshop. Participants would solve their own problems and collaborate with one another, with the facilitator offering guidance based on research related to public relations.

The Regional Program Office headquartered in Vienna, Austria, directed this training project. Upon acceptance of the proposal, training organizers immediately scheduled a series of fact-finding sessions focused on identifying State Department needs and outcomes sought. The role that improved public relations could have in achieving key objectives was also considered. These sessions proved immensely helpful as much was discovered about the circumstances of local staff tasked with communicating on behalf of the United States. Many of the unique challenges they face also came to light. As noted, short duration postings for officials from the United States frequently made international staff the public face of the organization for their community and, by extension, the U.S. government.

Having identified key challenges and opportunities that would be the focus of the training, developing specific training structures followed. The structure of each session was based directly on best practices related to active and experiential learning of public relations. Robust scholarship supports this approach, particularly Kolb's (1984) frequently utilized work on the subject (cited in Herz & Merz, 1998). This approach emphasizes learning by doing and is increasingly a staple of pedagogic methodologies in a range of public relations courses at universities:

Experiential learning exercises help students to confront problems; make decisions; understand conflict resolution; evaluate feedback; understand negotiation and bargaining and recognize, and perhaps change their attitudes . . . this offers an opportunity to interact with the real business world bringing

relevance and currency. (Alam, 2014, p. 117)

This is particularly important for an audience of working adults because the emphasis on utilizing experience and providing content for immediate application is crucial to meeting their needs (American Management Association, 1993; Knowles et al., 1998; Luke, 1971). To ensure the training sessions met this standard and served the needs of participants, a pre-seminar questionnaire was distributed to all attendees. This survey requested that participants evaluate the specific needs of the community they would be attempting to reach, along with an assessment of the outcomes that were being sought in terms of reaching key stakeholders. From this, participants were tasked with coming up with an overall strategy and possible tactics that would be part of that strategy. While participant proposals would be refined in training sessions, the pre-seminar questionnaire required developed answers and research related to the following questions:

- What goals does your post have for specific communities in the area that you serve?
- Looking at the goals, what do people in those communities like about the United States? (NOTE: It could be anything from music to clothes to movies to brands).
- What sorts of events and activities could your post do to showcase those areas of interest to people in the targeted community?
- How would these activities reinforce the positive feelings that the community has towards certain aspects of U.S. culture?

Seminar sessions were organized according to each area with creative participation among diverse practitioners framing the text of the training, as prescribed by Verčič et al. (2015). Sessions focused on the first “goals” bullet point would include an overview of the importance of establishing goals and objectives from the facilitator. The bulk of the session, however, would be collaborative sharing from participants about

the outcomes they have been tasked with achieving by their post. The “what do people like about the United States” item opens the door for sessions on audience analysis and the importance of understanding the attitudes and beliefs of a targeted public. Again, collaboration on this point is immensely important as seeing the distinctions between various publics is foundational for adaptation. The “events and activities” item would lead to sessions on the importance of tactics as instrumental activities that support goals and objectives. In this session, participant brainstorming about tactics in a safe space allows for creativity from multiple perspectives. The seminar was designed as an application-based endeavor with participants working with one another to develop, refine, and improve these plans with the guidance and direction of a facilitator, rather than a prescriber.

While this research represents an investigation into learner experience in a public relations training project, it could also be more broadly contextualized as an investigation into a specific case. As staff training was an essential component of U.S. State Department public diplomacy efforts, exploring that training from a case perspective provides heuristic value (Yin, 2013). Moreover, case studies have been recommended as a necessity in understanding the interplay between the activities of individuals within an organization and the effects of those activities on institutional outcomes (Lawrence et al., 2009). Training serves directive and creative functions in explaining individual activities within an organization, with organizational initiatives being better understood as an amalgamation of individual actions (Thompson, 2018). Thus, exploring public diplomacy training in the U.S. State Department functionally serves as an investigation of public relations pedagogy while providing a richer understanding of public diplomacy efforts overall. Assessment of outcomes is based on survey responses related to training effectiveness, coupled with qualitative inclusion of narrative statements

from participants detailing their experiences. As training sessions occurred in multiple contexts, results are compared based on group composition. Culturally homogeneous group results are compared with culturally mixed, heterogeneous group results.

Population and Assessment Survey

All training sessions consisted entirely of international staff employed by the U.S. State Department. These staff members were engaged in public relations and communication related activities on behalf of the United States. As the State Department mandated consistency, the structure of each course was standardized, meaning that, insofar as possible, the experience of each participant in each context would be reasonably similar to all other participants. Upon completing the course, participants were required to complete a survey that measured their overall experience and also an evaluation of how learning would allow them to meet key outcomes related to public relations. These measures were constructed by the State Department and were required for use in the course evaluation. This survey was developed by the State Department to ensure the investment in training produced a return in terms of participant outcomes. These State Department measures offer meaningful insights into the perceived outcomes learners experienced.

Participants responded to a four point, Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Assessed items on the scale included understandability, interest stimulated in course content, active participation, and the overall benefit sessions offered for future public diplomacy projects. Space was also provided for narrative responses where participants could directly share experiences in the training sessions.

Follow-up with participants and external observation of courses have consistently shown the survey to be useful for training outcome assessment (B. Pressler, personal communication, July 10, 2010).

Performance assessment, external observation, narrative responses, and review of the training sessions further validated the outcomes identified by participants in the questionnaire.

Group Composition Comparison

The training sessions' organization would also allow for an analysis of the effectiveness of public relations training in culturally heterogeneous versus culturally homogeneous groups. Specifically, several of the training sessions were slated to occur at a regional training office in Vienna. Participants for these sessions came from all over the world and collaborated on their respective projects together. Other sessions, however, occurred onsite in specific countries. The participants in these sessions all came from the same country. The opportunity to investigate the effectiveness of public relations training by comparing the outcomes of mixed, heterogeneous versus homogeneous groups was particularly compelling. It also offered the chance to evaluate how active and experiential learning strategies might be affected by group composition. This project provided a unique opportunity to explore how multinational groups of adult learners navigate public relations challenges in the training context.

There were two distinct contexts in which these courses were delivered with seven total sessions for this project. All sessions occurred from 2004 to 2014. Four of these sessions were delivered to participants at a regional training center in Vienna. The 48 trainees at these sessions came from different nations, as described in Table 1.

The other three sessions occurred at American Embassies in the following nations: Baku, Azerbaijan; Vienna, Austria; and Yerevan, Armenia. The 37 trainees in these sessions were all citizens of the respective country in which the training took place.

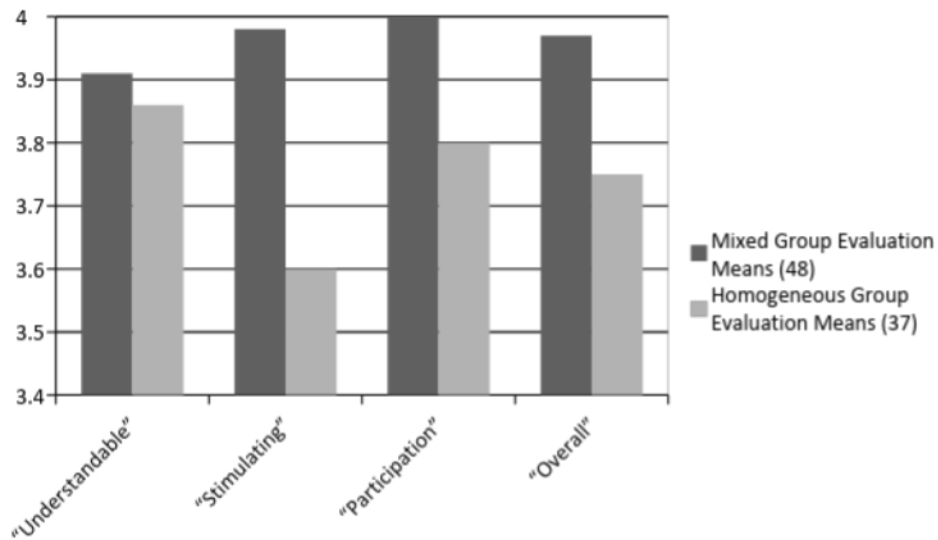
Table 1

Nationalities: Training Site Participants who Came to Vienna

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Africa | Europe |
| Madagascar | Albania |
| Mauritania | Austria |
| Mauritius | Belarus |
| South Africa | Belgium |
| | Bosnia |
| Asia | Bulgaria |
| Nepal | Croatia |
| Pakistan | Finland |
| Qatar | Georgia |
| Russia | Germany |
| South Korea | Iceland |
| Turkey | Moldova |
| Ukraine | Netherlands |
| | Portugal |
| North America | South America |
| Dominican Republic | Chile |

Results

In investigating the research question “What is the effect of active and experiential public relations training among non-U.S. citizens working for the U.S. State Department?”, it was expected that course participants would report general satisfaction with training outcomes. Research suggested the use of active, experiential, and applied pedagogy would be especially beneficial for this group of learners, and participant response supports such an approach. The mean scores from both groups on all assessed areas suggest general acceptance and appreciation for the training format. With a 4 indicating strong agreement with the perceived success of each area, the fact that the mean score of all participants approached 4 suggests the training was successful in fostering understandability, stimulation towards course content, active participation, and overall benefit for public diplomacy projects (see Table 2).

Table 2*Group Means*

Several open-ended responses from participants reflect appreciation for the active and experiential approach of the training:

"I liked how we worked directly on items that I'm dealing with at my post. I can see how this will help when I return to work right away."

"This was great! We had so much freedom and the facilitator really worked with us to figure out solutions to the problems we'd been having."

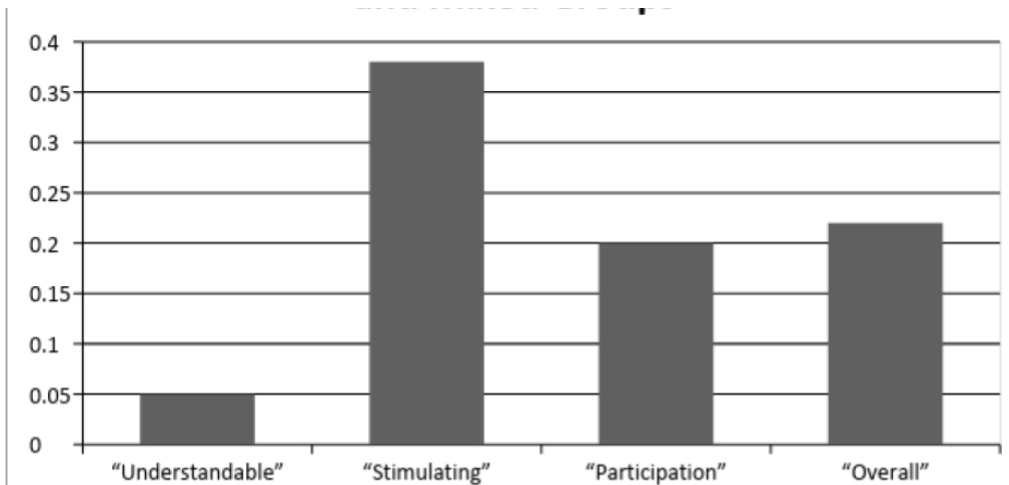
"This wasn't a lecture or a class, which I appreciated. They listened to me and let us work with each other."

Based on the literature that strongly supports active and experiential learning (especially considering the needs of adult learners focused on public relations), training outcomes should show that greater diversity in group composition would foster improved course satisfaction overall. To investigate the research question "What are the differences in

training outcomes between culturally homogeneous groups and mixed, heterogeneous groups of non-U.S. citizens engaged in public relations training for U.S. State Department?”, the difference between the means of mixed, heterogeneous groups versus homogeneous groups was calculated, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Evaluation Differences in Mixed vs. Homogeneous Groups: Mean Comparison



The “understandability” item was the only assessed area where the mixed nationality group did not clearly report higher outcomes than their homogeneous group counterparts. There are many viable explanations for this, including the fact that both groups scored quite high on this assessed item. Understandability also deals primarily with comprehension, rather than other measures that deal with creativity and development. In contrast, the area of greatest difference was in the stimulation offered by the content of the course. Those in the heterogeneous groups rated the stimulation received from the training at a 3.98 on a 4-point scale, while those in the homogeneous groups rated stimulation at 3.59. Experiential learning in public relations courses “requires that students draw on their direct

experiences to reflect, test, and create new ideas“ (Munoz & Huser, 2008, p. 215) and group diversity appears to enhance these areas. At an intuitive level, a group with more diversity would naturally have more rewarding and diverse experiences to share. The creative dimension of experiential learning also appeared to be enhanced by having a range of unique and differing perspectives present. Participant-reported training outcomes appear to have benefited by the presence of diversity in the training group. Narrative comments from participants in heterogeneous groups also reflect this:

“I learned so much from my colleagues from all over the world. It was great to hear they are facing many of the same issues as us.”

“Meeting people from all over was my favorite part of the course. They do some different things and we will totally look into trying them at our post.”

“I love my colleagues from around the globe!!!!”

“This was such a wonderful training and I will for sure be staying in contact with the people I met here. Great friends and we get so much from talking to each other.”

An example of an outcome produced by these activities emerged from German training participants tasked with youth outreach by the U.S. embassy in Berlin. Leaders at the embassy had also expressed interest in improving relationships with the large Turkish diaspora in the country. From the pre-seminar survey, the participants suggested programming that would appeal to both German and Turkish youth. Working on this approach at the seminar, participants identified research that showed German and Turkish youth had a particular interest in American hip-hop music. During seminar sessions, the German participants were able to build a series of events featuring American, German, and Turkish hip-hop artists who would appeal to the targeted demographic. Lauded by State

Department officials, the approach was seen positively as mirroring Cold War era public diplomacy:

The State Department's program is modeled on the jazz diplomacy that the U.S. government conducted during the Cold War by sending integrated bands led by Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Benny Goodman to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to counter Soviet propaganda and instead promote "the American way of life." (Aidi, 2014)

Such examples offer insight into the focus of the training sessions, where the bulk of the course was guided by management of tangible, real world public relations challenges, rather than lectures and directives from the facilitator.

Discussion

Diversity and Active Learning

The results broadly support the effectiveness of experiential and active learning strategies. Initially, this reinforces the rationale for such an approach for groups working on projects related to international messaging. In this instance, the application-based structure seemed ideal to a staff of non-U.S. citizens tasked with public relations initiatives by the U.S. State Department. The role they play in public diplomacy programs for the U.S. State Department has been well-established, and training outcomes like these speak to strategies on improving the training and preparation that goes into such initiatives. The creation of groups that were diverse in terms of nationality did not, in any way, compromise the overall effectiveness of active learning (Chang, 2009) and likely offered unique benefits that made the applied piece of the training more effective. This suggests an approach to international public relations teams' composition should likely attempt to ensure diversity of cultural backgrounds for such teams. As indicated, an organization that truly embraces international opportunities will integrate the perspectives of constituents from

throughout the world and create a vision for successful communication that transcends the limited perspective of a single group (Mahmoud, 1975; Wind et al., 1973). The composition of groups tasked with international public relations projects and the corresponding training they receive is an important element of this optimization.

The results of this project also reinforce the importance of facilitating diversity in the public relations classroom. As public relations, like all fields, continues to globalize its scope, educators would do well to create spaces of international engagement in their courses. Doing so supports the professional development of students who will be practitioners in a multinational environment. The feedback from this particular case would suggest that learning overall would be enhanced when public relations students learn through engagement with diversity.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this research are promising, yet key limitations should be acknowledged in the context of discussing this project's broader significance. Initially, the group being investigated was relatively small in size and highly specialized in terms of their needs. Non-U.S. citizens working for the U.S. State Department are distinct and tasked with a very specific form of public relations. Making more general assumptions about a larger population could prove problematic when thinking about the specialized nature of this group. While the training was intense and direct in its focus on applied experiential learning, the courses themselves were quite short (lasting only a matter of days). Whether or not this approach could be applied to sustained training and development done by an organization is something that needs additional investigation. Similarly, university public relations courses and programs with durations lasting semesters and years may face challenges when using a primarily experiential approach. Comparing this to previous research on experiential learning done in undergraduate courses is worthwhile, though the

comparison likely would not be a direct one.

Beyond items related to generalizability, there are broader issues with using this case to make assessments of experiential learning for adults in a training context. The population studied here was composed of many nationalities, yet it should be noted that these participants shared an important commonality: they all chose to work for the U.S. government. The decision made to seek employment at a U.S. institution is indicative of potential distinction from other citizens in the country in which one resides. Categorization of people from the same country as “homogeneous” is also potentially problematic, as subcultures within a state can indicate profound areas of difference despite shared nationality (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, in this study, satisfaction still appeared to be enhanced in groups composed of different nationalities. It appears, at least in this context, that internationalization of a training group led to better outcomes in terms of active experiential learning. Whatever similarities may exist in the people who participated in these sessions, it remains clear that there were tangible benefits based on the cultural diversity of the groups. When thinking about both the teaching of international messaging and the practice of public relations, the results suggest that heterogeneity can be the basis for higher levels of creativity and collaboration.

Finally, favorable post-training self-assessments suggest but fail to confirm positive training outcomes. Participant reporting is notoriously tricky when evaluating the success of any teaching or training initiative. People participating in a course may feel that they have learned a great deal only to ignore what they learned when that information is applied to field projects. It is also possible that, despite what they have learned, the reality of the situation they face on the job may not match the content explored in a course. While it is heartening that participants viewed the training as understandable, stimulating, engaging, and beneficial, any

declaration of the training's long-term success would involve a more longitudinal evaluation that assesses not only the direct outcomes of the training, but the direct outcomes of the lessons learned from the training, as well.

Conclusion

The results explored show promise for the use of experiential learning as an approach for public relations training and validate the importance of building international teams with an eye towards cultural diversity in terms of composition. This alone, however, does not fully speak to the experiences members had in the training context. A participant from the Dominican Republic discussed ways in which the embassy's substantial library resources could be more effectively utilized by nearby schools. A participant from Belarus focused on programs that could make democratic ideals attractive to the population under the constraints of an autocratic regime. Another participant from Turkey worked on promotional materials for a series of American film screenings that the embassy would sponsor in a country that remains fascinated by U.S. culture. By working on these projects directly in the training, participants were given the opportunity to receive immediate feedback. Rather than receiving lectures that they might be able to apply to their work, the content of the seminar functionally became their work. This is the sort of application-based learning that employees engaging in training prefer.

Application to Other Public Relations Instruction Contexts

Broadly considering public relations instruction overall, a learning-by-doing orientation appears to be more effective in meeting learner needs. Of particular note in this case, it appears that these projects were served by the diversity of the participants who were present. International messaging involves the building of complex relationships across a matrix of cultural influences (Samaha et al., 2014). The ability to adapt cannot

be facilitated in a vacuum. The presence of a culturally diverse group enhances the ability of that group to manage cultural variables in public relations practice.

More broadly, the effectiveness of such programs in meeting U.S. State Department goals for moderating the opinions and actions of global constituencies is less clear. Well-intentioned programs may attract interest from prospective stakeholders, but sustaining that interest and leveraging it into action is a considerably more difficult proposition. There is also the unique space of public relations that public diplomacy occupies. Intrinsically, public diplomacy is a public relations proposition (Sun, 2008). However, when the strategic element of public diplomacy is transparent to the individuals targeted, its effectiveness risks being compromised. As Schneider (2006) notes, “This should be a process of building bridges, not a one-way street. Developing respect for others and their way of thinking—this is what cultural diplomacy does” (p. 192).

Challenges like these are not easily navigated, and platitudes about public relations will do little in helping practitioners overcome them. Based on this research, the most productive approach would be transitioning from abstraction to action and ensuring that those tasked with speaking to global audiences have a correspondingly global team.

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Curriculum Rebuilding in Public Relations: Understanding what Early Career, Mid-Career, and Senior PR/Communications Professionals Expect from PR Graduates

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This manuscript reports on a survey of public relations practitioners about the professional attributes and job skills necessary for those who intend to enter the public relations field. Analyses compared differences and similarities between senior, mid-career, and early-career practitioners. Results indicate that writing, listening, and creativity are the three most significant skills aspiring public relations individuals should have, followed by the ability to think creatively, deal with an online reputation crisis, communicate effectively in today's environment of disinformation, and build a crisis response plan. Results found statistically significant differences across senior management, middle management, and early-career respondents on items measuring some skills and attributes (i.e., possessing business acumen, creativity, research/measurement skills, new technologies, digital storytelling, and an understanding of how to best interact with public relations and outside firms).

Keywords: hard skills, professional relevance, public relations education, public relations roles, soft skills

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Public relations education, now celebrating nearly 100 years in the United States, has come a long way since the first public relations course was taught at the University of Illinois in 1920, and the first degree program was offered by Boston University in 1947 (Wright, 2011). Over 1,200 universities and colleges today offer majors and/or undergraduate degrees in public relations, communication, public affairs, and other related disciplines (My College Options Research Center, 2017), and many others include public relations concentrations and minors in their curricula, reflecting the demand among students for formal training in the practice of public relations. With jobs in public relations projected to grow by 9% each year until 2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), this demand for high quality public relations education will also increase. Therefore, it is imperative for public relations educators to design courses and curricula to reflect the needs of the profession and prepare students to enter the workforce with the key tools and skills they need to be successful in their careers. As Brunner et al. (2018) noted, “Staying current with what students will need to be successful is often a high priority for programs large and small” (p. 22), as it should be.

An important question for public relations educators is what these key skills and tools are and what learning outcomes educators should focus on when designing courses and curricula. To answer this question, programs employ a variety of tactics, including engaging with alumni, forming advisory boards, and encouraging faculty involvement in industry groups (Brunner et al., 2018). However, gaps between the needs of the profession and the skillsets of the recent-graduate workforce continue to exist (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018), indicating perhaps the need for more rigorous, social scientific inquiry into the needs of the profession as perceived by the professionals. The present study is an effort to address this need through surveys conducted among public relations practitioners in the U.S. and around the world.

This study builds on the work of scholars such as DiStaso et al. (2009); Brunner et al. (2018); Ragas et al. (2015); and Auger and Cho (2016), as well as industry bodies like the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), to identify the skills important for the future of public relations practice. However, the results reported in this study represent a key point of difference from other survey-based investigations into the subject (e.g., DiStaso et al., 2009). This study not only presents a description of key skills and pieces of knowledge that professionals consider important for the future generation of communicators to possess but also includes an analysis of the differences and similarities between senior-level, mid-level, and early-career practitioners in what they consider to be priority skills. As we move closer to celebrating a century of formal public relations education in the United States, it is important to look forward to the next 100 years. Understanding what practitioners at different stages in their careers perceive to be important for the future of the practice may help provide further insight into how educators may need to design curricula and courses. Practitioners in different stages of their public relations career may have different experiences and lenses from which they think about what the future of the profession may look like, and unpacking differences or lack thereof in these professionals' views may help underscore the importance of certain attributes over others. In the section that follows, we situate this study in current literature and explicate the overarching research question that guided our inquiry.

Literature Review

It has been 47 years since Scott M. Cutlip and J. Carroll Bateman addressed the 1973 business meeting of the Public Relations Division of what was then the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) about the “unsatisfactory and disparate state of public relations education in the U.S.” (Commission for Public Relations Education, 1975, p. 57). Cutlip, who some consider to be the father of public relations education (Wright,

1991), was a professor at the University of Wisconsin at the time, and Bateman, a noted insurance industry executive, was extremely active in the PRSA and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). The Cutlip-Bateman AEJ report was the catalyst for the formation of the nation's first task force that had both educators and practitioners take a serious look at the state of public relations education. Over the next half century, a number of groups—frequently called “commissions”—would meet and author various reports designed to set standards and ideally help bring improvements to public relations education. Although the focus of these commissions centered on undergraduate education in the United States, several specifically looked at graduate education, and a few had international intentions.

Always co-chaired by an educator and a practitioner, these commissions and task forces received considerable support from professional associations, not only in the United States but also in other English-speaking countries. In addition to the original report published in *Public Relations Review* in 1975, other major reports include *A Port of Entry: Public Relations Education for the 21st Century* (1999), *The Professional Bond* (2006), and most recently *Fast Forward. Foundations and Future State. Educators and Practitioners* (2018). When the present study was conducted, the commission was co-chaired by Elizabeth L. Toth of the University of Maryland and Judith T. Phair of PhairAdvantage Communications. Members represent PRSA and 14 other professional societies, four of which are located outside of the U.S. The current commission also includes 20 at-large members.

Over the years, these commissions have made recommendations that have impacted curriculum development at a number of U.S.-based colleges and universities. Many of these curriculum recommendations and changes are the result of research these commissions conducted with subjects who either taught or practiced public relations. Given the strong

role the PRSA has played throughout the history of this commission activity, most of the practitioners serving as subjects in this research have been PRSA members, although, of course, other groups have been included in such research. Commission research conducted 20 years ago reported 35,000 students were majoring in public relations at nearly 700 U.S. colleges and universities (Stacks et al., 1999). Reporting on one of the most recent omnibus surveys conducted by the CPRE, DiStaso (2019) discussed the key knowledge areas, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that educators and practitioners surveyed in the study stated were expected from PR professionals and/or delivered by new PR graduates. The same report also explored important topics both professors and practitioners believed to be essential for curriculum. Practitioners in the CPRE report sample ranked writing, communication, and social media management to be the top three desired skills, and creative thinking, problem solving, and critical thinking as the top three abilities expected from PR professionals. The present study seeks to build upon this work and is therefore guided by the following research question:

RQ1: What skills and attributes do current public relations practitioners consider important for the future generations of communicators to possess?

Professional Attributes

Public relations academics have attempted to identify and rank the importance of professional attributes for nearly half a century (Ingram, 1975). Katz and Kahn (1978) developed a theory of organizations that called for similar studies in other occupational groups. As Johansson and Larsson (2015) have explained, the various roles in which public relations and communications professionals serve have been studied thoroughly. The earliest work examining occupational attributes in public relations practice involved research conducted by Broom and Smith (1979) that led to a number of studies (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995).

Although initial reports about this research focused on four practitioner roles, upon reflection and clarification, their future studies suggested these two major roles: communication technician and communication manager (Broom & Dozier, 1986). Later work by Wright (1995) identified a three-role typology, adding communication executive to this mix, while a study by Moss and Green (2001) suggested five major roles.

As Argenti (2016) and Marshall (1980) have explained, occupational expectations of public relations executives began changing in the 1970s, and a “new breed” of the public relations executive started to surface. Burson (2004, 2017), who *PRWeek* named “the century’s most influential PR figure” (“The 20 most influential communicators,” 2018, para 2), explained the expectation changes, noting that public relations used to only be involved in helping organizations answer questions about how to say something. Decisions about what to do, how to do it, and what to say were made by others. Over time, the most successful organizations have begun to seek assistance from public relations experts in making decisions about these questions. As a result, the public relations function has changed during the past few decades from something that mainly focused on media relations into an executive-level function that has become part of the decision-making dominant coalition of many organizations. These changes, and the need for them, have been discussed by Grunig (1992), Berger (2005), Gregory (2008), Bowen (2009) and others.

A field that once was not much more than publicity and public information now encompasses research, measurement, problem solving, crisis communication, organizational authenticity and more. Understanding more about what current public relations people predict will be important for future generations of practitioners to know will help public relations educators make more informed and effective decisions about curriculum and course content. Furthermore, understanding whether

professionals at different stages in their career hold different perceptions of key future skills would help public relations educators understand the future of the industry from multiple perspectives and contribute to the design of more effective public relations courses and curricula. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: How do professionals at different stages in their career view the importance of various attributes and skills differently?

Method

This manuscript is part of a broader collaboration between Boston University and *PRWeek* to understand the state of the public relations profession. Surveys were conducted among public relations practitioners using Qualtrics' online survey interface. The survey consisted of 72 closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions, excluding demographic questions. Of those, 32 items asked the participants to respond to the question, "How important is it for the next generation of communicators to have skills/expertise in each of the following areas?" followed by skills such as "writing" and "ability to lead teams." Participants' responses to these 32 items formed the focus of this manuscript. All closed-ended items were measured on 5-point Likert scales ranging from "very unimportant" to "very important." The survey instrument was developed by the authors of this study in consultation with *PRWeek*.

The link to the survey was sent along with an invitation to participate to all subscribers of *PRWeek*, as well as members of other PR-related organizations, both U.S.-based and global (i.e., PRSA, PR Council, the International Public Relations Association, and board members of the Institute for Public Relations). Reminders to complete the survey were sent to *PRWeek* subscribers at three time points following the first email. Survey links were also posted on social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), as well as in the form of a pop-up advertisement on *PRWeek's*

website. A total of 1500 surveys were started; however, given the length of the survey (~20 minutes), the survey had a high drop-out rate, yielding a total of 799 responses ($N = 799$). Of these, 296 (37.04%) participants reported being male, 479 said they were female (59.94%), while the remaining 24 participants either did not answer the question or said they preferred not to answer. The gender distribution of the sample closely mirrors the U.S. public relations industry, as women have been reported to comprise 65.7% of the industry (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018), making our sample representative of the field. The age distribution of the sample is reported in Table 1.

In terms of geographic location, 107 of our respondents reported being based outside of the United States, while the rest were located in the United States. The relatively low number of participants from outside the U.S. hindered our ability to perform comparative analyses between U.S.-based and international practitioners. The sample was, therefore, considered as a whole rather than analyzed by location.

Table 1

Age Distribution of Sample

| Age | Frequency |
|-------------|-----------|
| Under 30 | 81 |
| 30-39 | 163 |
| 40-49 | 179 |
| 50-59 | 224 |
| 60-69 | 119 |
| 70 or older | 20 |
| Total | 786 |

Table 2*Distribution of Respondents' Current Positions*

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| | Chairman/CEO/Founder/President | 107 |
| | CCO (in-house) | 37 |
| | MD/GM (agency) | 23 |
| Senior Management | EVP (agency) | 18 |
| | EVP (in-house) | 3 |
| | SVP (agency) | 30 |
| | SVP (in-house) | 18 |
| | VP (agency) | 17 |
| | VP (in-house) | 51 |
| | Associate/Assistant VP (agency) | 2 |
| Middle Management | Senior Director PR/Comms | 39 |
| | Director PR/Comms | 120 |
| | Senior Manager PR/Comms | 43 |
| | Manager, PR/Comms | 76 |
| | Specialist, PR/Comms | 61 |
| | Senior Account Supervisor | 4 |
| | Account Supervisor | 8 |
| Early-Career | Senior Account Executive | 8 |
| Professionals | Account Executive | 17 |
| | Account Coordinator | 11 |
| | Others | 105 |
| | Total | 798 |

Answering RQ2 necessitated classifying the respondents into three categories based on their current reported position. Based on discussions between the authors and *PRWeek* and the research team's collective knowledge of industry practices (the third author of this study is the former CEO of Ketchum), participants were classified into senior management, middle management, and early-career practitioners. Toward the end of the survey, all participants were asked to report their current positions in their organizations and to choose one of 21 positions noted in Table 2. Importantly, 13.39% of our sample ($n = 107$) reported being either the chairperson, CEO, president, or founder of their own company/firm. Thirty-seven (4.63%) participants were chief communication officers (CCO), and 23 (2.88%) reported being either managing directors or general managers of an agency. The distribution of the positions held by the respondents is reported in Table 2.

Individuals classified as senior management included those who reported being CEO/chairperson/president/founder, CCO, MD/GM, executive vice president, or senior vice president ($n = 236$). Vice presidents were classified as middle management, as were associate/assistant vice presidents, senior director PR/Comms, director PR/Comms, senior manager PR/Comms, manager PR/Comms, and specialist PR/Comms ($n = 409$). Account executives, account coordinators, senior account executives, account supervisors, and senior account supervisors were all categorized as early-career practitioners ($n = 48$). Of the sample, 105 respondents stated their current position as being "other," precluding their classification into one of the three categories as we were unable to classify them accurately.

All data analyses were conducted using Stata IC/14. ANOVAs were conducted to understand whether there were differences in participants' responses based on level. Post-hoc analyses were conducted using Bonferroni's test for pairwise comparisons.

Results

To answer RQ1, the means of all 32 items were calculated and analyzed for interpretation. Table 3 contains a summary of the means for the 32 items related to the importance of skills in the future. As this table indicates, overall respondents ranked writing ($M = 4.79$), listening ($M = 4.70$), and creative thinking ($M = 4.61$) as the most important skills for aspiring public relations practitioners. This ranking closely follows that of the CPRE's (DiStaso, 2019) report. The top three skills noted earlier were followed by the ability to deal with an online reputation crisis ($M = 4.61$), the ability to communicate effectively in today's environment of disinformation ($M = 4.61$), creativity ($M = 4.54$), and the ability to build a crisis response plan ($M = 4.49$). The importance of new technologies for the future of the practice was scored lower than expected by our respondents. For example, the specific application of virtual reality was scored an average of 3.19, while that of artificial intelligence was 3.36.

Table 3

Summary of ANOVA

| Item* | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Creativity | 4.54 | .59 | .42 | n.s. |
| Possessing business acumen | 4.40 | .67 | 8.97 | <.0001 |
| Multilingual abilities | 3.43 | .82 | 1.45 | n.s. |
| Having a global mindset | 4.04 | .80 | 3.97 | <.05 |
| Listening skills | 4.70 | .54 | .03 | n.s. |
| Research/measurement skills | 4.33 | .67 | 4.76 | <.01 |
| Writing skills | 4.79 | .49 | .80 | n.s. |
| Experiential | 3.85 | .79 | 0.48 | n.s. |
| Ability to lead teams | 4.12 | .72 | 0.77 | n.s. |
| Ability to develop talent | 4.15 | .74 | 2.64 | n.s. |
| Application of new technologies (e.g., AI, AR, VR, Blockchain) | 3.82 | .87 | 2.74 | n.s. |
| Specific application of AI (Artificial Intelligence) | 3.36 | .92 | 4.71 | <.01 |
| Specific application of AR (Augmented Reality) | 3.22 | .92 | 3.71 | <.05 |
| Specific application of VR (Virtual Reality) | 3.19 | .92 | 3.42 | <.05 |
| Specific application of Blockchain | 3.01 | .90 | 4.76 | <.01 |

| Item* | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| How to best use PR firms in a convergent, integrated, high velocity age | 3.97 | .85 | 6.67 | <.01 |
| How to best use other outside consultants in a convergent, integrated, high velocity age | 3.89 | .81 | 6.41 | <.01 |
| Ability build a modern crisis response plan | 4.49 | .68 | 0.01 | n.s. |
| Ability to deal with online reputation crises | 4.61 | .60 | 1.49 | n.s. |
| Branded content | 4.18 | .72 | 1.40 | n.s. |
| Paid content | 3.76 | .88 | 1.16 | n.s. |
| Paid media | 3.69 | .91 | 1.52 | n.s. |
| Earned media | 4.38 | .70 | 0.21 | n.s. |
| Shared media | 4.15 | .74 | 0.39 | n.s. |
| Owned media | 4.15 | .82 | .01 | n.s. |
| Work with big data | 3.91 | .86 | .24 | n.s. |
| Media buying | 3.32 | .97 | 2.95 | n.s. |
| Digital storytelling | 4.41 | .70 | 3.43 | <.05 |
| Social listening | 4.4 | .67 | 2.38 | n.s. |
| Creative thinking | 4.61 | .57 | .24 | n.s. |
| Understanding the complexity of today's global communications networks | 4.31 | .73 | 2.26 | n.s. |
| Ability to communicate effectively in today's environment of disinformation | 4.61 | .59 | 1.20 | n.s. |

***Anchor Item:** How important is it for the next generation of communicators to have skills/expertise in each of the following areas?

M = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation, *F* = *F* statistics, *p* = *p* value

To answer RQ2, responses from participants at different stages in their careers (senior management, middle management and early career) were compared using one-way ANOVA tests to understand the impact of professional level on reported importance of skills for the future. In the paragraphs that follow, we present analyses of all 32 items across the three professional levels (i.e., senior management, middle management, and early-career practitioners).

Of the 32 items, differences were found only for 10 across the three professional levels. Table 4 provides the means across professional levels of the skills found to be significantly different across levels. For

example, the ANOVA for the importance of creativity was not statistically significant [$F(2, 705) = .42, p = .658$], indicating general agreement about the importance of creativity as a skill for future practice ($M = 4.54$; $SD = .59$). Similarly, the importance of multilingual abilities was not significantly different across the three levels [$F(2, 704) = 1.45, p = .235$]. Practitioners at senior, middle, and early levels were consistent in their consideration of the importance of multilingual abilities, the importance of which was found to be moderate rather than crucial ($M = 3.43, SD = .82$). Also, the importance of the PESO (paid, earned, shared, owned) framework was consistent across the three professional levels, with paid media registering the lowest means across the four [$F(2, 695) = 1.52, p = .218; M = 3.69, SD = .91$]. Unsurprisingly, participants across professional levels agreed about the importance of earned media, with little variance in means across the three groups [$F(2, 697) = .21, p = .814; M = 4.38, SD = .70$]. Writing skills [$F(2, 704) = .80, p = .448; M = 4.79, SD = .49$], the ability to build a modern crisis plan [$F(2, 703) = .01, p = .995; M = 4.48, SD = .68$], the ability to deal with online reputation crises [$F(2, 701) = 1.49, p = .226; M = 4.61, SD = .60$], and the ability to communicate effectively in today's environment of disinformation [$F(2, 697) = 1.20, p = .300; M = 4.71, SD = .59$] were all similarly scored highly and consistently by the participants as key skills for the future of the public relations industry.

Table 4

Summary of Means across Professional Levels (significant values only)

| Item* | Early Career | Middle Managers | Senior Managers |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Possessing business acumen | 4.43 | 4.30 | 4.51 |
| Having a global mindset | 4.3 | 3.98 | 4.07 |
| Research/measurement skills | 4.69 | 4.34 | 4.26 |
| Specific application of AI (Artificial Intelligence) | 3.32 | 3.26 | 3.47 |

| Item* | Early Career | Middle Managers | Senior Managers |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Specific application of AR (Augmented Reality) | 3.19 | 3.12 | 3.31 |
| Specific application of VR (Virtual Reality) | 3.11 | 3.10 | 3.28 |
| Specific application of Blockchain | 2.87 | 2.91 | 3.11 |
| How to best use PR firms in a convergent, integrated, high velocity age | 4.09 | 3.86 | 4.09 |
| How to best use other outside consultants in a convergent, integrated, high velocity age | 3.98 | 3.79 | 4.01 |
| Digital storytelling | 4.51 | 4.45 | 4.32 |

***Anchor Item:** How important is it for the next generation of communicators to have skills/expertise in each of the following areas?

Ten items were found to have statistically significant differences across the three groups (see Table 4). To further investigate the differences across the three groups, Bonferroni's pairwise comparisons were used as a post-hoc test. First, the importance of possessing business acumen was found to be different across the three groups [$F(2, 708) = 8.97, p < .001; M_{\text{total}} = 4.41, SD_{\text{total}} = .67$]. Bonferroni's pairwise comparisons revealed a significant difference between top/senior management ($M_{\text{senior}} = 4.51$) and middle management ($M_{\text{middle}} = 4.30$). Senior managers considered possessing business acumen to be more important than middle managers did. No significant differences were found between early-career practitioners ($M_{\text{early}} = 4.43$) and the other two groups.

Having a global mindset was also found to be different across groups [$F(2, 708) = 3.97, p < .05; M_{\text{total}} = 4.04, SD_{\text{total}} = .80$]. Specifically, early-career practitioners considered having a global mindset most important across the three groups ($M_{\text{early}} = 4.30$) and significantly more important than middle management ($M_{\text{middle}} = 3.98$). Senior managers'

perceptions of the importance of having a global mindset were not significantly different from either group ($M_{\text{senior}} = 4.07$).

Another skill that revealed significant differences was research/measurement skills [$F(2, 705) = 4.76, p < .01; M_{\text{total}} = 4.33, SD_{\text{total}} = .68$]. Although all three groups considered research/measurement as an important future skill, early-career practitioners reported the highest importance across the three groups ($M_{\text{early}} = 4.69$) and were significantly different from perceptions of senior managers ($M_{\text{early}} = 4.26$) but not middle managers ($M_{\text{middle}} = 4.34$).

In terms of new technology, while participants across groups did not disagree about the importance of the application of new technologies [$F(2, 702) = 2.74, p = .065; M_{\text{total}} = 3.81, SD_{\text{total}} = .87$], differences were found across the groups about the importance of the application of specific technologies. The importance of the specific application of artificial intelligence, for example, was found to be different across the three levels [$F(2, 699) = 4.71, p < .01; M_{\text{total}} = 3.37, SD_{\text{total}} = .93$], as were augmented reality [$F(2, 696) = 3.71, p < .05; M_{\text{total}} = 3.21, SD_{\text{total}} = .93$], virtual reality [$F(2, 698) = 3.42, p < .05; M_{\text{total}} = 3.19, SD_{\text{total}} = .92$], and Blockchain [$F(2, 687) = 4.76, p < .01; M_{\text{total}} = 3.01, SD_{\text{total}} = .90$]. For all four types of new technologies, senior managers considered their application to be significantly more important than did middle managers, but no differences were found between early-career practitioners and the other two groups. The means for the application of Blockchain were particularly interesting, as early-career ($M_{\text{early}} = 2.87$) and middle managers ($M_{\text{middle}} = 2.91$) considered it relatively unimportant for the future compared to senior managers ($M_{\text{senior}} = 3.11$).

Finally, senior managers and early-career practitioners considered it important for future practitioners to know how best to use PR firms and outside consultants in a dynamic, fast-paced environment more so than middle management did. Specifically, on the item, “[the importance

of knowing] how to best use PR firms in a convergent, integrated, high velocity age,” [$F(2, 693) = 6.67, p < .01; M_{\text{total}} = 3.96, SD_{\text{total}} = .85$], senior managers’ report ($M_{\text{senior}} = 4.09$) of its future importance was much higher than middle management’s ($M_{\text{middle}} = 3.86$).

Discussion

The purpose of this manuscript was two-fold; first, we sought to understand the key skills and attributes that public relations practitioners consider important for future generations of communicators to master. Second, we wanted to understand the differences in perceptions of respondents at different positions and professional levels. Unlike similar studies that have focused mainly on mid-level and early-career practitioners, this research also included a larger than usual sample of senior-level practitioners, enabling richer analyses of such perceptual differences. Writing, creativity, and listening were found to be scored the most highly in terms of important skills for future practitioners to excel in, followed by creative thinking and managing crises both offline and online. Results found statistically significant differences across senior management, middle management, and early-career practitioners on items measuring these skills and attributes: possessing business acumen, creativity, research/measurement skills, new technologies, digital storytelling (see Table 4), and how to best interact with public relations firms. In the paragraphs that follow, we unpack the implications of this study.

Public Relations Hard Skills are Still Relevant

The results of this study echo the findings of several years’ worth of research into public relations education that writing is an essential skill for aspiring public relations practitioners (e.g., Barber et al., 2012; CPRE, 2015; DiStaso et al., 2009). The present study found that not only did writing as a skill score the highest level of agreement from participants about its importance, this agreement was consistently high across the

three professional levels. As the CPRE (2018) has noted, “Educators and practitioners agree that writing is essential” particularly as platforms continue to emerge and evolve (p. 13). This finding also builds upon DiStaso et al.’s (2009) work that writing was an essential skill for entry-level applicants by examining whether such a requirement was considered important by those at the top of their profession as well as those just starting out. As demonstrated through the analyses of variance, writing was considered important regardless of professional level. The same was true for creativity, social listening, and expertise in earned, shared, and owned media (see Table 3). The ability to develop plans for both online and offline crises (see Table 3) was also considered an important skill across all three levels.

Interestingly, the importance of research and measurement skills was the highest among early-career practitioners. Although the averages across all three professional levels were high (well above 4 on a 5 point scale), early-career practitioners considered research and measurement to be significantly more important than did the senior executives in our sample. Research, as CPRE (2018) has also noted, remains a “bedrock of professional public relations” (p. 14). One potential explanation for the higher scores on research and measurement from early-career professionals may be the emphasis on these skills in their own undergraduate or graduate curricula, as has been recommended by the CPRE, quite correctly so.

Furthermore, senior-level managers consistently considered new technologies such as AI, AR, and VR to be significantly more important than did middle managers. This finding is in line with Meng and Berger’s (2018) study, which found that Millennials reported lower levels of value for new technology than their managers thought they did. Based on this finding, senior-level executives, who have a broader insight into the profession and business at large, believe that these new technologies

will play an increasingly important role in the public relations profession. On the other hand, senior managers' relatively stronger emphasis on new technologies may simply reflect their own discomfort and/or inadequacies with such technologies. Regardless, although technology did not score very highly in this particular study, the need for universities and colleges to respond to this change in the technological landscape remains an important challenge, especially given the rapid speed at which technological changes take place. Technology, then, remains a "triple threat challenge" (CPRE, 2018, p. 14).

Our findings also echoed calls from industry leaders about the importance of public relations practitioners being literate in the language of business (e.g., Barber et al., 2012; Ragas et al., 2015). Across all three professional levels, the importance of possessing business acumen was rated highly; however, of the three sets of professionals, senior executives scored possessing business acumen highest, significantly more than mid-level managers. It is possible that senior executives' experience and broader worldview of the business world contributed to this difference. This particular finding holds meaningful implications for building public relations curricula, particularly for programs whose students may not have access to classes in business schools. Business literacy then needs to be built into basic curricula by public relations faculty so future generations are well-versed in the language of business, as recommended by senior managers. Perhaps one way for programs to incorporate this recommendation is to add business-related modules to both required and elective courses in the curriculum, such that students gain business literacy within the context of core PR concepts. Another option for PR programs is to collaborate with their counterparts in business schools and design blended, co-taught courses that may benefit both sets of students. This finding, and indeed, the recommendation for business literacy courses to be part of the core is slightly at odds with the CPRE (2018) report,

which recommended business literacy as an additional area of study rather than as a part of the core curriculum. However, both the CPRE's (2018) recommendations and the results of this study continue to echo the importance of incorporating business courses into public relations curricula.

Soft Skills

Several soft skills were rated highly as being important for future practitioners, similar to Barber et al.'s (2012) and DiStaso et al.'s (2009) findings. Specifically, the ability to lead teams and to develop talent were both scored highly across all three professional levels, echoing the findings of several public relations scholars (e.g., Berger & Meng, 2010; Ewing et al., 2019). However, despite its importance, effective leadership tends not to be a topic included in public relations curricula as an area of skill development (Auger & Cho, 2016).

Understanding the complexity of today's global communication networks, too, was found to be important for future public relations practitioners to master. Additionally, respondents seemed to feel the pressure of the current media environment, and noted that the ability to communicate effectively in today's environment of disinformation was a crucial skill that future practitioners will need to master.

Limitations

As with any research endeavor, this study does suffer from some limitations. First, the results of these analyses are generalizable only to PR practitioners who are *PRWeek* subscribers or affiliated with the four industry groups whose members were invited to participate in the study. Second, although our focus is on public relations education in the United States, we did have some participation from respondents across the world. Future research may seek to investigate differences between practitioners' perceptions of key skills across different countries and conduct comparative analyses. Third, although we have interpreted the findings for

public relations education, our question asked about which areas future generations need to have expertise/skills in rather than what they need to be educated in; however, we believe our interpretation of the responses to be a logical extension. Fourth, the classification of participants into groups for analyses across levels depended on self-reported titles. Other variables, such as organization type and size, size of teams, etc., were not taken into account while performing the classification. Further studies should consider these factors in the classification of participants.

Finally, certain KSA areas highlighted by the recent CPRE report (DiStaso, 2019) were not included in this particular article as they have been reported elsewhere. For example, although DiStaso (2019) emphasized ethics as one of the most desired knowledge areas for PR practitioners, ethics was not addressed as a skill for future practitioners. This is because the importance of ethics was investigated in a different part of the survey where we asked respondents to report on key areas that were crucial for their current practice. Given that ethics education has been recommended by the CPRE for several years (DiStaso, 2019), it was not studied as a skill for future practice. Instead, we sought to understand how important ethics were to our respondents' current practice, reporting on which would be outside the scope of the current article. Despite these limitations, we believe the findings of this study have significant implications for public relations education.

Conclusion

This study brings forth a number of implications for public relations curricula and course development. Some of the skills deemed to be most important for public relations practitioners have been taught for years in university-based public relations degree programs. The most pronounced of these is writing, which enjoys a long history of being a required PR course perhaps due to public relations programs historically being housed in colleges of journalism. Required courses teaching media

relations, creativity, and creative thinking also enjoy a long association in PR education.

More recently, many university-based public relations degree programs have developed required or elective courses in subjects such as PR or communication research and measurement, crisis communication, new technologies, and global/international communication. However, this article highlights the importance of several additional areas of focus for PR programs to consider, including coursework on listening, digital storytelling, communicating effectively in today's environment of disinformation, leadership, how to work effectively with PR firms and other outside consultants, and most importantly, business acumen.

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Demystifying Data: A Constructivist Approach to Teaching Statistical Concepts Using SPSS

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To improve public relations students' self-efficacy and knowledge of statistics, two hands-on activities were created. One activity used data simulation in the software program SPSS, and the other used printed statistical outputs. Both activities were introduced in a flipped-classroom format as part of a crossover experimental design. The results indicated that knowledge of statistics and self-efficacy for learning statistics increased following the two activities. The results also suggested that the activity using data simulation may have been especially effective for increasing self-efficacy for learning statistics.

Keywords: public relations research, statistics, constructivism, active learning

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Certain challenges are inherent in teaching research methods to public relations students. In particular, public relations students tend to have high levels of math anxiety, and this anxiety causes them to avoid quantitative information (Laskin & Sisco, 2010). Although many public relations students may dislike numbers, a basic understanding of statistics is increasingly important for future public relations practitioners (Jain, 2016). Not all public relations programs require separate statistics courses, but, even so, public relations students increasingly need a basic understanding of how statistics relate to strategic decision-making. According to the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE, 2018), students “must be able to go beyond the numbers and identify the implications of those numbers to produce actionable insights for the client” (p. 83). The ability to use data for strategic planning may be particularly important for public relations practitioners operating in convergent communication models (Burton, 2019). Therefore, even if they do not plan to run statistical analyses in their future jobs, public relations students need a conceptual understanding of statistics so they can make strategic decisions based on statistical data. In particular, future public relations practitioners should understand information such as the meaning of correlations and p-values (Public Relations Society of America & The American Statistical Association, 2011). Although some public relations undergraduate programs require introductory statistics courses, the task of teaching students basic statistical concepts often falls to instructors of public relations research courses.

By using active learning strategies, public relations instructors can encourage math-averse students to use statistical data for strategic decision-making. For example, students can use the online platform Perusall, which requires students to comment on readings and respond to each other’s comments for a grade, to promote an active learning experience. Such readings could include articles from Harvard Business

Review such as “A Refresher on Statistical Significance” (Gallo, 2016), “When to Act on a Correlation, and When Not To” (Ritter, 2014), and “Beware Spurious Correlations” (2015). However, some students retain their fear of numbers even following active engagement with such applied reading activities.

Therefore, the author developed an in-class activity that used statistical software as an innovative way to allow for more in-depth, hands-on learning. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to teach basic statistical concepts to public relations students who had never taken a statistics course. The software program activity, which required students to take a more proactive approach and simulate data, was used alongside a more traditional, paper-based activity using SPSS outputs. This paper examines how a flipped classroom approach incorporating both of these activities affected students’ statistics knowledge and self-efficacy to learn statistics. Furthermore, using an experimental crossover design, this paper compares the relative effects of the two different activities.

Literature Review

In an analysis of the Great Ideas for Teaching (GIFT) awards presented by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication from 2000-2009, it was found that 45% of the awards were given for teaching elements that reflected a constructivist approach for “higher learning” (Cuillier & Schwalbe, 2010). Constructivism suggests that, rather than simply disseminating information, teachers should give students opportunities to intentionally build knowledge (Anthony, 1996). This approach, which relies heavily on experiences and activities, may be more useful for helping students learn to evaluate ideas on their own (Cuillier & Schwalbe, 2010) and, therefore, may be appropriate for students who need statistics primarily for strategic decision-making (CPRE, 2018).

Building Knowledge Through Active Learning

Constructivism is the theoretical background driving active learning in flipped classrooms, where lecture may be delivered via online videos and students take an active learning approach in the classroom through group activities (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Research has suggested that the active learning itself, and not the flipped classroom, is the real reason that students develop a better understanding of material delivered in this format (Jensen et al., 2015). Virtual reality learning environments, for example, have been described as helpful because, in line with the constructivist paradigm, knowledge is based on active experience and dependent on the environment in which learning takes place (Huang et al., 2010). Similarly, computer-based modeling tools and simulations have long been considered useful for helping students build a deep understanding of course concepts (e.g., Dalgarno, 2001).

Active learning interventions have been demonstrated to improve learning outcomes significantly across a variety of different science and math courses (Freeman et al., 2014). Furthermore, several studies have demonstrated that active learning exercises consistent with a constructivist approach lead to student success in introductory statistics courses (e.g. Gnanadesikan et al., 1997; Smith, 1998). Instructors for statistics courses have propounded the use of real-life activities as a form of active learning, including simple field experiments, observation of chance events, and observation of correlated events (Smith, 1998).

Improving Self-Efficacy to Learn Statistics Through Active Learning Strategies

In addition to improving knowledge, hands-on activities may be particularly important for improving self-efficacy when teaching statistics to public relations students. Self-efficacy to learn statistics represents a student's confidence in learning to use statistical data (Finney & Schraw, 2003). Past research has found that active-learning class formats can

improve self-efficacy for statistical analysis in both biology (Ebert-May et al., 1997) and psychology (Harlow et al., 2006). Social science classes incorporating statistics into the coursework frequently use active learning strategies, and several instructors have created activities around SPSS. One study found that undergraduate criminal justice majors were less anxious when learning about statistics using SPSS rather than with a traditional class with calculations (Stickels & Dobbs, 2007). Journalism classes have used computer software to teach statistical concepts for decades (e.g. Burkhart, 1987) because learning to use SPSS allows students to gain the skills to analyze and interpret their own survey data. Statistical software programs may also improve communication students' self-efficacy for learning statistics. Burkhart (1987) argued that "intellectually, students who learn to use computer programs to perform statistical analysis of data will gain confidence in critical use of statistical data provided by news sources" (p. 4). Therefore, the use of SPSS to improve self-efficacy for learning statistics is worth examining in the context of public relations research.

Active Learning Through Simulations

SPSS and similar applications may be particularly useful as platforms for simulation activities for teaching quantitative methods in public relations research courses. For example, students can simulate their own datasets in SPSS that demonstrate what participants' responses would be if certain survey items are or are not correlated; SPSS can then be used to test whether their simulated responses do or do not correlate. Simulations, a form of active learning used in other types of public relations courses like crisis communication, can help students gain key skills (e.g. Wang, 2017). Simulations using statistical data may be similarly useful to help students gain knowledge of quantitative data analysis that can be applied for strategic communication practices. Student-simulated datasets have the particular advantage of requiring

students to actively create patterns in responses, whereas other activities require students to more passively recognize those patterns.

Simulation-type activities have been used to teach statistics in public relations in the past, though generally not with SPSS. Gallicano (2017) demonstrated the usefulness of an active, problem-based approach to teaching statistics in a public relations course using social media analytics from Facebook. Using information about social media interactions from a Facebook fan page, students learned about normal distributions using an online standard deviation calculating tool. Students then created visualizations of standard deviations for the purpose of understanding a social media fan page's distribution of interactions for the purpose of objective-setting. In Gallicano's (2017) activity, the combination of visualizations and active calculations may have been particularly beneficial. For concepts such as correlations and significance levels, however, other tools may be required.

Public relations faculty members at major universities do sometimes use SPSS in public relations research courses, but they may not use it for data simulation activities or to teach basic statistics. Current uses of SPSS in public relations research courses may include an overview of the application's uses and interpretation of an SPSS output. More involved uses of SPSS may include statistical analysis as part of a class research project. Because SPSS is already used in public relations research courses for other purposes, however, this software could be repurposed for simulation activities. In particular, by allowing students to simulate their own datasets and create graphs, activities using SPSS simulations may prove helpful for improving students' understanding of correlations.

Classroom exercises were developed by the author to provide students with active learning opportunities to gain a deep understanding of Pearson's correlation and significance. Two types of exercises were devised: a lab-based exercise, which allowed students to simulate data

consistent with a constructivist approach, and a paper-based activity, which required students to interpret statistical outputs without data simulation. Both the lab activity and the output activity were created using SPSS version 25.0. Although past research suggests that a simulated activity using SPSS would be more effective for improving statistics self-efficacy and knowledge (e.g. Burkhart; 1987; Gallicano, 2017), the seemingly advanced nature of the program and public relations students' level of math anxiety may make a simpler, paper-based activity more helpful for students.

RQ1a: Does learning about statistics using the combination of a computer simulation and a paper-based activity improve students' level of understanding of statistics?

RQ1b: Does the use of a computer-based simulation activity or a paper-based activity more greatly improve knowledge of statistics?

RQ2a: Does learning about statistics using the combination of a computer simulation and a paper-based activity improve students' self-efficacy to learn statistics?

RQ2b: Does the use of a computer-based simulation activity or a paper-based activity more greatly improve self-efficacy to learn statistics?

Method

Course Overview

Data regarding the use of the classroom activity were gathered from two public relations research classes during the spring 2019 semester. To establish a baseline, all students were given a survey regarding statistics knowledge and self-efficacy to learn statistics a week before any of the activities. The survey was given again following each of the activities the students completed. A total of 45 students took part in the study, but only 30 completed all measures and were included in the final analysis ($n = 17$ for Group A and $n = 13$ for Group B). Although small, a sample of 30 is considered acceptable for within-subjects studies

(Oberfeld & Franke, 2013), and, therefore, the data could be used to test RQ1a and RQ2a. However, the between-subjects tests for RQ1b and RQ2b were considered exploratory due to the small number of participants in each group.

No statistics courses are required as a prerequisite for this course, and basic quantitative methods, including survey question design, probability sampling, and basic statistics, are taught over a four-week period in the course. After one week discussing the normal curve, confidence intervals, and confidence levels in class, students began a two-week period of flipped classroom-style lessons consistent with active learning approaches. To support the flipped classroom format, students watched videos created by the instructor explaining basic statistical concepts. All students took an online quiz on these videos before class on Day 1 of the study, when the first in-class activity took place. Videos of SPSS demonstrations also prepared students ahead of time to interpret SPSS outputs and complete the lab-based SPSS activities.

SPSS Lab Activity

The simulation activity took place in a computer lab reserved for the class. This activity used an SPSS file with several variables in place but no participant responses (i.e., no data appeared in “Data View”). Students were guided through the steps in the exercise with written instructions and screenshots (see Appendix A). Several variables were named. For each variable, the original survey question was included in “Variable View,” and the response options were entered under “Values.” The primary variables used in this case were two scale items adapted for a coffee company from the integrity dimension of trust in Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relationship scale for publics: “Starbucks treats people like me fairly and justly” and “Whenever Starbucks makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.” Students taking part in the exercise had previously used this integrity scale in a classroom

activity while discussing types of survey questions. For that activity, students responded to the items in class for a different chain restaurant and then averaged their responses. They also observed whether or not they answered similarly to the items to spark a conversation about the nature of reliability. As a result, students were expected to understand that people were likely to respond in a similar direction for the items in the integrity scale.

Students began with a warm-up activity in which they reviewed all of the variables in “Variable View,” labeled each variable as scale or nominal, and created new variables in SPSS. In addition to improving their comfort with using the application, this warm-up allowed students to become familiar with the two key scale items. Next, students engaged in the active learning activity for correlation. Students were given these instructions: “Create responses for participants 1-30 for the first two variables, Trust_1 and Trust_2, so that the responses should be strongly, but not perfectly, correlated.” Students then ran a Pearson’s correlation in SPSS and were asked to assess whether the correlation was strong and significant. The interpretation of Pearson’s correlation had previously been demonstrated and explained in the videos that students viewed before class as part of the flipped classroom format. If they were confused, students interacted with the instructor when they were unsure of how to interpret the information.

Students who were unable to generate a strong, significant correlation repeated the exercise until they were successful. Students frequently had to attempt the exercise several times, but all were able to successfully complete the exercise. Once they were successful, students were directed to generate a scatter-dot plot for the two variables and assess what a strong correlation looked like. Finally, students were instructed to repeat all steps for a weak correlation. If students finished the assignment early, they were told to repeat it for a correlation in a different direction

(e.g. a negative correlation if the previous one were positive). Measures for knowledge and self-efficacy were administered at the end of class after all students had completed the exercise.

SPSS Output Activity

Outputs from statistical analyses in SPSS are already used in some public relations research courses, and therefore, an output-focused activity was used as the comparison activity. For this activity, students were asked to get into groups of three to four people. Students then worked through the steps outlined on an activity sheet (see Appendix B). The activity sheet was attached to a list of survey questions regarding students' perceptions of a local nonprofit gym. Also attached was an output of analyses for the dataset, including frequencies, descriptive statistics, an independent-samples t-test, and two correlation matrices. One of the correlation matrices was made up of items for the same integrity dimension of trust used in the lab-based activity, but in this case the scales were used for the nonprofit gym.

For the paper-based activity, students worked through similar information as in the lab-based activity. To make the activity more interactive and similar to the computer lab-based activity, the instructions required students to write a hypothesis about the relationship between two scale variables and drawing a scatter dot plot depicting one of the predicted relationships. Furthermore, to meet the constraints of the course schedule, this activity included information regarding descriptive statistics and a very brief introduction to an independent-samples t-test. Students worked through the problems in their groups, and then the groups shared their findings with the rest of the class. The instructor discussed any problems with the hypotheses they formed in their groups, gave a demonstration on a whiteboard for what scatter dot plots might look like for different types of associations, and corrected any erroneous interpretations from the outputs. Therefore, the activity was interactive and

covered similar material to the lab-based activity. However, the activity did not allow students to simulate their own datasets to produce outputs and graphs.

Experimental Design

An experimental crossover design was used to evaluate the overall usefulness of SPSS-based activities in the context of a flipped classroom and to compare the relative value of each kind of activity. Before covering information regarding probability and statistics, all students were given the opportunity to complete a paper-based survey measuring both self-efficacy to learn statistics and knowledge of Pearson's correlation. This measure took place one week before the first activity was scheduled. Subsequent data collection then took place over the course of three consecutive class meeting days.

Students were randomly assigned to two groups. Group A took part in a lab activity first and a paper-based activity second, and Group B completed the paper-based activity first and the lab activity second (see Table D1 for full schedule). On Day 1, Group A took part in the in-class activity using the statistical software SPSS in a computer lab and filled out the measures for statistics self-efficacy and statistics knowledge at the end of that class period. Group B used this time outside of class to complete a separate assignment not related to statistics. Then, both groups met in class for Day 2; all students took part in an activity using printed outputs from statistical analyses to learn about basic statistics. Measures for knowledge and self-efficacy (see Appendix C) were administered at the end of class. Finally, for Day 3, Group B took part in the same in-class activity Group A completed on Day 1 using SPSS in a computer lab setting while Group A completed an unrelated class assignment outside of the classroom. Students were offered five points extra credit for taking part at three different points in the intervention (the baseline and two activities; see Table D1). If they completed all three components, students then received

an additional five points extra credit. All measures were administered by colleagues from a different field of study so that students did not feel pressured by the presence of the instructor, and all students used anonymous identifiers on their surveys. All elements of the study were approved by the institutional review board before the study began.

Survey Measures

Survey questions for the statistics self-efficacy scale were adapted from Finney and Schraw's (2003) scale for self-efficacy to learn statistics. This scale asks participants to rate their confidence in their ability to learn about a number of statistical procedures (see Appendix C). Finney and Schraw's (2003) scale includes advanced statistical concepts not covered in the course and does not include measures for applied use of statistics in a public relations context. As a result, the original measures were adjusted for this project. For example, one of the items in the self-efficacy scale asked students to rate their ability to learn to, "analyze the results from a survey using a Pearson's correlation" on a scale running from 1 (no confidence) to 7 (complete confidence). Following the administration of the surveys, the measures were assessed for internal consistency, which was found to be high ($\alpha = .96$).

The measure of statistics knowledge, which was reviewed by an education expert to ensure content validity, took the form of five open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Open-ended questions were used so as to best capture students' constructed knowledge created through active learning. These questions were coded by the instructor with 1 point or half-point partial credit given per question. The measures for statistics knowledge and self-efficacy to learn statistics were administered simultaneously at all three points of measurement.

Demographics

Demographic information was gathered from students on the last scheduled activity day for their group; one student declined to provide any

demographic information but responded to all scale items and was retained for the final sample. As previously stated, 30 students ($n = 17$ for Group A and $n = 13$ for Group B) completed measures for the scale items all three times, and those who did not complete all three were removed from the sample. The demographic make-up of the students who completed all measures was 73% White, 17% African American, and 3% mixed race. The sample was 80% female and comprised of 18 juniors and 11 seniors. Only 30% of the students reported previously taking a statistics course.

Results

The first research question addressed whether a) the use of hands-on activities as part of a flipped classroom would improve public relations students' understanding of statistics and b) if one type of activity was more helpful than another. A paired-samples t-test comparing knowledge measures for the entire sample both before the flipped classroom format began (baseline) ($M = .28$, $SD = .67$) and following the final activity (activity 2) ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.30$) did show a significant increase in knowledge ($t(29) = -8.10$, $p < .001$). Therefore, when used as part of a flipped classroom format, the activities did help students understand statistical concepts.

To further explore the relative advantages of the two types of activities, a mixed-design ANOVA with group (Group A, Group B) as a between-subjects measure and day in class (baseline, activity 1, activity 2) as a within-subjects factor was used to test for an interaction. No interaction was found for the between group assignment and students' knowledge across the three measurement points ($p > .05$). Although the study did not demonstrate that using SPSS was better for constructing knowledge than using a paper-based activity, the findings support that the use of both exercises together contribute to the construction of knowledge.

Tests were also conducted to answer the second research question regarding the effects of the activities on self-efficacy for learning statistics.

A paired-samples t-test comparing self-efficacy measures for the entire sample from the baseline ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.81$) to the activity 2 ($M = 5.47$, $SD = .96$) also showed a significant increase in self-efficacy ($t(29) = -6.16$, $p < .001$). To explore the second part of RQ2 and compare the effects of the two activities on self-efficacy for learning statistics, a mixed-design ANOVA with group (Group A, Group B) as a between-subjects measure and class day of measurement (baseline, activity 1, activity 2) as a within-subjects factor was used to test for an interaction. Because Mauchly's test for the assumption of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(2) = 18.63$, $p < .05$), the degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\epsilon = .67$). The interaction between group and measurement time was significant ($F(1.34, 37.37) = 6.59$, $p < .05$), and inspection of the marginal means indicated that this interaction was driven by Group A's greater self-efficacy for learning statistics following activity 1 compared to Group B's self-efficacy following its activity 1 (See Figure D1).

Follow-up tests were conducted to interpret the interaction. Independent-samples t-tests indicated that, although the difference in self-efficacy for the two groups was not significant at baseline, when both groups were assessed before they took part in any activities ($p > .05$), there was a significant difference between the two groups in the measure of self-efficacy for activity 1 ($t(28) = 2.67$, $p < .05$). Group A, which was made up of students who took part in the lab-based activity as their first active learning experience, had higher self-efficacy for learning statistics following the activity 1 ($M = 5.52$, $SD = .98$) compared to students in Group B ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.20$), who took part in the paper output-based activity as their first active learning experience. Group A maintained this level of self-efficacy when measured again following the paper-based activity for activity 2 (see Figure D1 for a graph of the marginal means). Due to the low number of students in each group, the analysis comparing

the two different teaching activities (lab activity for Group A vs. paper-based activity for Group B) should be considered exploratory. However, the findings do suggest that the lab-based activity may have had a particularly strong influence on self-efficacy for learning about statistics.

Discussion

This paper supports past findings that active learning strategies can improve both learning self-efficacy (Ebert-May, et al. 1997; Harlow, et al., 2006) and knowledge (Gnanadesikan, et al. 1997; Smith, 1998). Students' self-efficacy improved primarily when they participated in activities that allowed them to experience the data through virtual simulation in SPSS. This finding is consistent with research that the learning environment is key for learning construction to take place (Huang, et al. 2010). Students can gain confidence about statistics by using statistical analysis software and creating their own dataset simulations. Most of the students in this study had never previously taken a statistics course, but they were able to engage with SPSS in a way that improved their self-efficacy for learning statistics. Based on the findings from this study, both activities are recommended for improving the self-efficacy of public relations students, but students may receive the greatest benefit by taking part in the lab-based simulation first.

Furthermore, although the study was not able to distinguish between the effects of two types of activities on knowledge, over the course of the entire study, students' knowledge of statistics also improved. Students did not demonstrate significantly different knowledge of statistics following the first activity; this may be in part due to the challenging nature of the open-ended questions, which may have weakened the discrimination power of the knowledge measure. However, by the second hands-on activity, knowledge for all basic statistical concepts increased significantly for both groups of students. Therefore, although the study could not demonstrate that one activity was better than another for

increasing knowledge, there is evidence that the combination of both activities improved knowledge of statistics. These activities may therefore be used over a two-day period as a part of a flipped classroom to improve student knowledge of basic statistical concepts.

Related Activity Learning Opportunities

The lab activity also offered multiple opportunities for discussion regarding other aspects of correlations and survey questions related to the course content. For example, students in the study who did not use the whole 5-point scale for their simulated responses had difficulty finding significant Pearson's correlations. This experience led to discussions regarding the nature of scale variables and why 5-point and 7-point scales are often used to measure attitudes rather than scales with fewer items. These discussions were used to teach students to design surveys with specific uses of the data in mind.

Similarly, when they tried to assess if they had simulated the activity properly, some students initially had difficulty distinguishing between the meaning of correlation coefficients and the significance level. The instructor used this opportunity to reinforce the importance of the two separate pieces of information and, in particular, to note that significance is important for all of the statistical tests discussed in class, but that the correlation coefficient was information unique to correlations. To demonstrate how the correlation coefficient indicates the strength and direction of a relationship between two scale variables, the instructor used the scatter dot plots students created as part of the lab activity (see Appendix A).

The simulation activity also gave students the opportunity to learn the process for analyzing actual survey data, even though that was not the main purpose of the exercise. The steps for running correlations in SPSS are the same for real data as for simulated data. Students who want to conduct quantitative research in the future have, therefore, not only

improved knowledge and self-efficacy for statistics but have also been given instructions that can be used to analyze their own survey results. However, even if these students never analyze their own data again, they will have experience with how survey data can be analyzed and interpreted, which may improve their ability to discuss analysis provided by others.

Limitations and Future Research

This study used a crossover design with random assignment to understand which active learning strategies best improve statistics knowledge and self-efficacy to learn statistics. Due to class schedule constraints, the crossover design did require that students from the two groups take part in the printout activity during the same class (see Table 1). The presence of both groups could have influenced the results even though students were told to engage only members from their respective groups for the printout activity.

Furthermore, although the randomized groups are a strength of the study, participant attrition was a problem. A total of 15 participants did not complete all components of the study. Slightly more students in Group B did not complete the study, which, with the small sample available, could have influenced the results. However, based on the findings, students who completed the lab-based activity first (Group A) should have had higher self-efficacy. Their relatively higher self-efficacy may have made members of Group A more disposed to come to class for subsequent lessons, which may explain the differences in participant attrition for the two groups. Furthermore, although the sample was sufficiently large to make reasonable conclusions about changes in knowledge and self-efficacy based on the pretests and posttests for the entire sample ($N = 30$), the interaction and comparisons between Group A ($n = 17$) and Group B ($n = 13$) for self-efficacy should be considered exploratory. Therefore, the small sample size limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the different

effects of the lab-based and computer-based activities.

In addition to limits in the study design, limits should also be acknowledged in the classroom exercises described here. Additional activities should be used to complement this approach and to make sure students understand how correlational data may be used in the context of strategic planning. Furthermore, the activity described here does not address the common misconception that correlation can lead to causation. Therefore, students who took part in this study also participated in other learning assignments during the semester to supplement their understanding of correlation and significance.

Future studies of activities for teaching public relations students statistical concepts might explore how learning about Pearson's correlation may lay a foundation for understanding other statistics. Learning about correlation can help students to understand the general principle of covariance. Therefore, this single activity can be used as a springboard to discuss the conceptual meaning of Cronbach's alpha and simple linear regression by drawing conceptual comparisons. Cronbach's alpha can be compared to a correlation with more than two items, and linear regression may be described as a more advanced form of correlation that can be used to draw lines and make predictions. Although these definitions are not precise, a vague and intuitive understanding of information, called gist, is often more likely to be used in decision making (Reyna, 2008). "The gist representation is the answer to the question 'What does 22.2% mean?' to that individual" (Reyna, 2008, p. 851). Consequently, students are more likely to use an intuitive understanding of statistics for decision-making rather than a technical definition. Therefore, this exercise for a single statistical test prepares students to have constructed conceptual knowledge of several statistical procedures without using any equations or mathematical calculations. Future research may also examine other activities with student-simulated datasets, which could be used to explore,

for example, concepts like standard deviation.

Conclusion

Using an experimental crossover design, this study examined how statistical software can be used to teach basic statistical concepts. SPSS and similar programs allow students to create simulated datasets. By attempting to create participant responses that would lead to certain statistical outcomes, students learn on a deeper level about what those outcomes mean. As part of an active learning approach in a flipped class format, this activity significantly increased students' self-efficacy for learning statistics. Knowledge of basic statistical concepts also improved, although this change was not specifically tied to the simulated data activity. An active learning approach to teaching quantitative methods is recommended for encouraging public relations students who may be otherwise intimidated by statistics in the public relations research curriculum. Using SPSS in lab-based activities, either alone or in combination with activities based on SPSS outputs, may help students gain confidence and construct knowledge for how to use statistics in their professional practice.

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Appendix A

SPSS Computer Lab Activity

Note: Screenshots of SPSS have been removed from the original activity.

Working with Nominal and Scale Variables

- 1) You have been emailed the dataset for this exercise in a file called SPSS_Blank_Exercise_SP19.sav; please download this file to your desktop. Please note that you will only be able to open files ending in .sav (and .spv for the output files) on computers that run the application SPSS.
- 2) Review the variables currently in Variable View, especially the Label and the Values for the first two variables, Trust_1 and Trust_2. To see the values, click once and then click again on the [...] that appears
- 3) Label each of the variables as Scale, Ordinal, or Nominal under the Measure Column
- 4) Create a new nominal variable, including the information for Name, Label (the question as it would appear in Qualtrics), Values (response options), and Measure category.
- 5) Create a new scale variable, including the information for Name, Label (the question as it would appear in Qualtrics), Values (response options), and Measure category.

Understanding Strong and Weak Correlations

- 1) Switch to Data View.
- 2) Create responses for participants 1-30 for the first two variables, Trust_1 and Trust_2, so that the responses should be strongly, but not perfectly, correlated.
- 3) Test the Pearson's correlation between Trust_1 and Trust_2 in SPSS:
Analyze > Correlate > Bivariate
 - a. Select the variable (please note that the Label, not the Name, appears in SPSS, but if you hover the cursor, the Name will appear).
 - b. Click the arrow button in the middle to move the variables over that we want to test.
 - c. Click Ok.
- 4) Review the Output window. Look for the correlation coefficient – is it strong? How do you know? Is it significant? How do you know?
- 5) Visualize the results by creating a scatter dot plot. Go to Graphs > Chart Builder.
 - a. Choose the first "Scatter/Dot" option (Select Scatter/Dot and then double click on the first option that appears)
 - b. Place Trust_1 on the x-axis and Trust_2 on the y-axis by dragging the variable over to the picture of the graph.
 - c. Click "OK"
- 6) What does the plot look like for a strong correlation?
- 7) Repeat steps 1-6, but this time create a weak correlation.

Appendix B
SPSS Paper-Based Output Activity

1. Review the survey questions on p. 1 (Variable View).
2. Review the responses for participants 1-10 on p. 2 (Data View).
3. Write a hypothesis for the relationship between 2 of the starred scale variables.
4. Draw one conclusion from the information on p. 3 (Frequencies Output) that is relevant to a campaign for a gym.
5. Draw one conclusion from the information on pg. 5 (Descriptive Statistics).
 - a. Which variable has the highest standard deviation? What does this mean?
 - b. Which variable has the lowest standard deviation? What does this mean?
6. Find the information that will give you the confidence interval on p. 7 (you will have to do some simple math).
7. What do the 1s mean in the correlation matrix on p. 9?
8. Circle all of the negative correlations on p. 9.
9. Put a square around all of the nonsignificant correlations on p. 9.
10. Draw a picture of what a graph for what one of the significant correlations would look like. Is it strong? Weak?
11. Find the significance level for the t-tests on pg. 10. Signal the instructor once you have finished this step.

Appendix C
Measures for Self-Efficacy to Learn Statistics and Statistics
Knowledge

Part 1: Self-Efficacy to Learn Statistics

Directions: Please indicate how confident you are that you could learn to complete the following tasks (1=no confidence, 7=complete confidence).

1. Explain what a Pearson's correlation is conceptually.
2. Interpret the information regarding a Pearson's correlation (correlation coefficient) that appears in a journal article.
3. Use Pearson's correlation coefficient to draw a basic graph indicating what the results might look like when graphed.
4. Explain what significance level (p value) means conceptually.
5. Interpret a significance level (p value) that appears in a journal article.
6. Design survey questions that will allow you to run a correlation.
7. Analyze the results from a survey using a Pearson's correlation.

Part 2: Statistics Knowledge

Directions: Please give as much information as you can to answer each of the following questions. We have intentionally given you more room than we think you will need; please write as much information as you can. Make sure to put something down for each question even if you are unsure of the answer.

1. What does a Pearson's correlation tell us?
2. What does it mean if a Pearson's correlation is strong?
3. What does it mean if a Pearson's correlation is weak?
4. What is a significance level (p value)?
5. How does the significance level (p value) for a Pearson's correlation influence how we interpret the correlation?

Appendix D

Tables and Figures

Table 1
Order of Activities

| | Day 0 | Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3 |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Group Activity | Baseline measure for Group A and Group B | Group A Lab Activity; Group B not in class | Group A and Group B Classroom Activity | Group B Lab Activity; Group A not in class |
| Intervention Order | Baseline | Group A Activity 1 | Group A Activity 2 Group B Activity 1 | Group B Activity 2 |

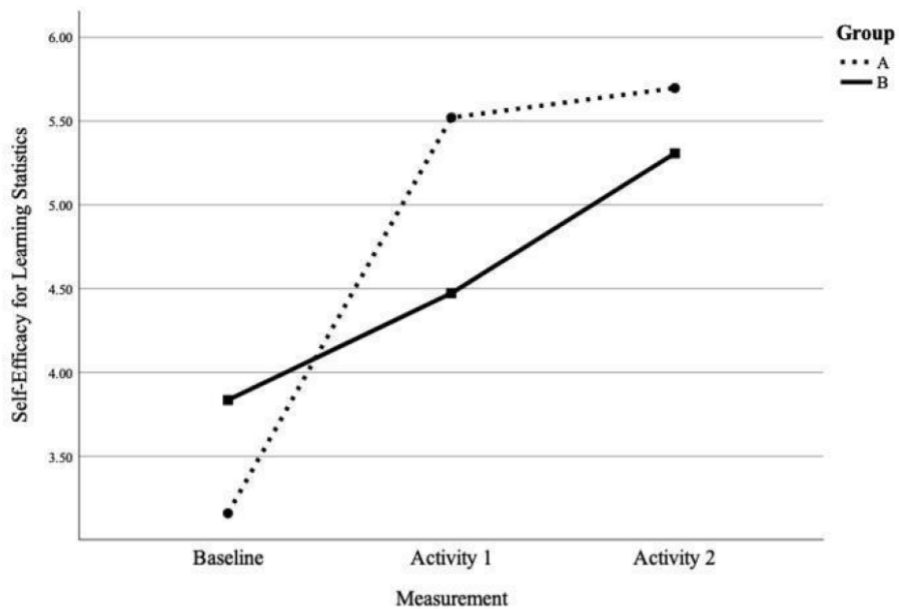


Figure 1. Graph showing increase in self efficacy for Group A and Group B.

Learning about Diversity Worldwide: How a Social Media Writing Assignment Provides Students with Multicultural Perspectives

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Studies and reports from public relations scholars, educators, and practitioners have shown that public relations students should gain intercultural competencies and multicultural perspectives before they enter the public relations industry. This article explains how a blog calendar and social media assignment for specific global markets can help students acquire international and multicultural competencies in the area of writing for the public relations classroom.

Keywords: writing, blog, social media, diversity, teaching

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Introduction and Rationale

In today's increasingly multicultural and globalized world, public relations professionals and students alike need to develop skills to communicate with diverse communities within their own country and abroad. In addition, communicators must create verbal and visual content to reach multicultural and international audiences, particularly with the increasing use of online platforms around the globe.

The author developed an assignment for students in a public relations writing class to create social media content and an editorial calendar for a blog on behalf of a fictitious retailer seeking to connect with diverse audiences in a specific international market. This assignment not only provided students with greater challenge and creativity but also required them to research and learn about multicultural populations and cultural traditions abroad.

Economic Reality and Shifting Demographics

Today's U.S. public relations practitioners, regardless of where they work, most likely will communicate with global markets. For example, foreign sales based on a percentage of total Standard & Poor's 500 sales exceeded 40%—43.6% in 2017, 43.2% in 2016, 44.3% in 2015, and 47.8% in 2014 (Silverblatt, 2018). The U.S. Small Business Association (Glaccum, 2019) touts on its website that “nearly 96 percent of consumers live outside the U.S., and two-thirds of the world's purchasing power is in foreign countries” (para. 2). The world is also experiencing shifting populations, geographical distribution of the middle class, and religious adherents. Demographic trends show a significant rise in global migration—among a population of 7.3 billion people, one out of every 30 residents resides outside his or her country of birth (International Organization for Migration, 2018)—bringing increasing diversity to countries with existing generations of multicultural people. In 2015, half of the 3 billion people classified as the global middle class were from

Asian countries, while the proportion of the middle class is estimated to increase to two-thirds from Asia by 2030 (Kharas, 2017). Predictions also indicate that the world's religious populations will continue to shift by 2050, with Muslims almost equaling Christians, the largest religious faith. The Buddhist population is predicted to remain stable, while Hindu and Jewish populations, various folk religions, and other religions (such as Baha'is, Jains, and Sikhs) will grow in size (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Global Interconnectivity

Interconnectivity steadily rises with more than half of the world online—56% of the world's population are active internet users (Statista, 2019a). In 2019, almost 3.5 billion people used social media platforms, a 9% rise over the previous year (Chaffey, 2019). Facebook draws 1.47 billion desktop daily active users and 1.57 billion mobile daily active users, with 85% of daily active users coming from outside of North America (Omnicores, 2019a). YouTube has over 2 billion logged-in visitors worldwide every month, with content in 80 languages and local versions in over 100 countries (YouTube, 2019). Instagram has approximately 1 billion monthly active users (Omnicores, 2019b) with the United States leading, followed by Brazil and India (Statista, 2019b), while 79% of Twitter's accounts are from outside the U.S. (Omnicores, 2019c). In addition, the blogosphere remains vibrant, with an estimated 505 million blogs (SoftwareFindr, 2018).

Need for Multicultural Perspectives in Public Relations

A number of scholars over the past few decades have recommended a greater emphasis on global perspectives, as well as multicultural, intercultural, and international skills for public relations students in the U.S.; they also recommend an integration of global and cultural diversity learning experiences in the classroom and overall curriculum (Bardhan, 2003; Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Sriramesh, 2009; Zaharna, 2000). Taylor (2001) called for "internationalization" in

undergraduate education to enable students to become competent and culturally sophisticated public relations professionals in the global arena. Over the past decade, studies have examined other dimensions of global public relations education. Tsetsura (2011) recommended that students learn multidimensional diversity, with an analysis of master characteristics and interactional identities, to prepare for communicating within a global marketplace. Azionya et al. (2019) addressed the benefits of a value-based education approach that fosters an ethical and poly-contextual examination of diverse societies in public relations education. Wolf and Archer (2016) looked at successful learning outcomes for communicators to effectively manage in a global and digital era, which acknowledges not only technological skills, but “more importantly [demands] excellent on- and offline communication skills, tolerance, empathy and diplomacy” (p. 9).

Connection to Practice

The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 Report on Undergraduate Education (2018) ranked writing for all platforms as a top skill for public relations. It addressed the desirability of diverse multicultural perspectives for entry-level job candidates in public relations. The report included diversity and inclusion results from the 2016 omnibus survey and found that public relations practitioners and professors rated diversity and inclusion as important KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) for new hires to have; for practitioners, the concept of diversity and inclusion was one of the top three ranked areas of knowledge needed by new hires. Practitioners “value candidates who demonstrate a multicultural perspective, but also indicated that they are not seeing that perspective” (p. 143-144). Not surprising, writing ranked as the most desirable skill (4.88 out of 5), followed by communication (4.76) and social media management (4.33). The report also examined preferred characteristics for new employees, which again pointed to writing performance as highly desired by practitioners (4.88), but not found as

frequently as desired (2.90).

The Global Communications Report (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019) surveyed both public relations practitioners and students about their views on the future impact of technology in the field. Following the PESO model (paid, earned, shared, and owned media), CEOs selected shared media (social media and online influencers) as the most valuable media for the future at 38%, whereas students ranked shared media as even more important at 70%. Another finding was the importance of the storytelling characteristics of imagery in the future: “YouTube and Instagram, whose popularity are based on photographs and videos, are projected to be the big winners in an era of decreasing attention span” (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019, p. 30).

Assignment and Implementation

A multicultural blog and social media assignment was introduced in a 300-level Writing for Public Relations course that requires students to create an editorial calendar for a new blog and write content and select visual imagery for specific social media platforms for a certain country. The author created a fictitious American-based retailer of home accessories and food products (a blend of Williams Sonoma, Sur La Table, and Pier 1), which was launching stores in a new international market. The fictitious co-founders of the retailer are a man and woman, with one from the U.S. and the other from another country. The retailer sells home décor, kitchenware, dinnerware, serving dishes, seasonal decorations, and food products from around the world. This context provides students with the ability to draw upon rich opportunities for storytelling and visual imagery. Food, for example, plays an important part in cultures of all kinds and continues to be a tradition handed down from generation to generation, particularly during the holidays and special occasions. Avid cooks of any background also enjoy trying recipes from other cultures. Croatian-Italian-American celebrity chef Lidia Bastianich (PBS, 2017) explains the

cultural significance of food: “Food feeds our souls. It is the single great unifier across all cultures. The table offers a sanctuary and a place to come together for unity and understanding” (para. 1). In addition, the fictional retailer’s holiday decorations provide content to illustrate diverse secular and non-secular celebrations on online platforms.

To date, the assignment has covered Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Singapore, and South Africa. The country or countries for new markets can vary by semester. Students are required to reset the English language setting on Microsoft Word, which currently offers 16 versions of English. Although the computerized English language settings do not capture all nuances, they do help students grasp key differences between American English and other versions of English.

Before students work on the assignment, the instructor should cover the following topics:

- Intercultural and multicultural writing considerations on editing U.S. idioms and applying culturally sensitive verbal and visual content that avoids ethnocentrism and othering (i.e., avoid language “used to communicate instances of perpetuating prejudice, discrimination, and injustice either through deliberate or ignorant means,” MacQuarrie, 2010, p. 635);
- An overview of social media strategies, such as establishing clear communication goals and building brand awareness with relatable, shareable, and interactive content appealing to specific audiences, and writing tactics to attract a following;
- Preferred terms (following the latest edition of *The Associated Press Stylebook*), ethics, and decorum for blogs and social media platforms, along with real-world examples of blogs, tweets, and posts with impactful and appropriate visual imagery.

Students are required to research a specific country’s diverse population and religious preferences, as well as its national, secular, and

religious holidays, in order to create content that makes the retailer's products relatable with a soft-sell approach to the new market. The first part of the assignment is preparing a 12-month editorial calendar for a new blog. Students develop various story ideas (headline and first few sentences) that address the opening dates of the new stores; religious holidays celebrated by the diverse population; leading secular and national holidays; and other special events that celebrate the country's diversity (a few examples in Canada could include National Indigenous Peoples Day, Toronto Caribbean Carnival, Small World Music Festival, TD Mosaic Fest, and Pride Toronto).

Drawing upon the topics in the blog editorial calendar, students then create content for Twitter (three tweets with proposed handle, hashtags and image), Facebook (three posts with images, hashtag, and copy), Instagram (three posts with image, hashtag, and copy), and YouTube (explanations for three different videos describing visuals, story concept, and storytellers).

Students would require a minimum of one week to work on the assignment, which can be completed on an individual basis or in collaboration with one other student. Instructors should allocate one class session for in-class writing, where instructors can review and discuss drafts with students. A debriefing should take place after the assignments are graded and returned. The professor can show examples of both high- and lesser-quality student work (without identifying the students) on PowerPoint and engage in a discussion on culturally appropriate and respectful content with the entire class.

An assignment example with Canada as the new market is included in the Appendix.

Assessment

The key learning objectives for the multicultural blog and social media assignment are as follows: 1) to identify cultural traditions and

holidays that showcase the diversity of the population in other countries; 2) to compose visual and verbal content for the blog calendar and social media platforms; and 3) to develop intercultural writing skills in communicating with specific global audiences and their diverse populations, as well as skills for communicating online with the LGBTQ community.

Assignments are evaluated on the students' ability to accomplish the following: 1) to demonstrate knowledge of a range of holidays and cultural traditions covering diverse religions and populations in a specific country; 2) to write culturally respectful copy and select supporting imagery; 3) to incorporate the retailer's founders and types of food and home accessory products in the blog's editorial calendar and social media platforms as appropriate by using a tasteful, soft-sell approach; and 4) to edit and proofread copy thoroughly. This assignment counts for 10% of the total grade.

Conclusion

The author has observed that students seem to enjoy learning about cultural traditions in other countries and find the assignment engaging yet rigorous. One challenge has been helping the students learn how to write with an authentic voice, not one that sounds like hard-sell advertisements. Other students may need help learning how to avoid American idiomatic expressions. The solution can be to show examples of real-world tweets and posts that highlight various respectful, soft-sell approaches.

Although this assignment was designed for the Writing for PR course, it could be used in an International Public Relations course. With technology constantly evolving, the social media platforms could be adjusted to apply the most popular social media platforms worldwide. In addition, the instructor could change the "client" from a retailer of home accessories and food products to another type of organization. As noted earlier, the country selection could vary and include more than one country.

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Appendix A

Assignment (Example for Canada):

Editorial Calendar for Blog and Social Media Content

Assignment Guidelines: Your new “client,” Home Decor & Celebrations (a fictitious company like a blend of Pier 1, Sur La Table, and Williams Sonoma), is a retail chain based in Chicago, with 10 stores across the U.S., with new stores opening in Toronto, Ontario, in September 20XX and in Vancouver, British Columbia, in March 20XX. The company sells home

accessories, such as rugs, lighting, and window treatments; decorations for the holiday indoors and outdoors; dinnerware sets, cutlery, serving dishes, cookware, table linens, glasses, and barware; and coffees, teas, sauces, rubs, spices, oils, vinegars, pastas, condiments, baking mixes, cocktail mixes, and food gift sets. The company focuses on selling distinctive decorative, culinary, and utilitarian products from around the world. It also has hired a team of experts to prepare tips on how to decorate and entertain for various holidays and celebrations; how to use spices and sauces to liven up dishes; and how to decorate your home or apartment with international flair.

The founders are James Chandler, who was a chef at one of Chicago's most celebrated steakhouses, and Amanda Chang, who is from Vancouver and an award-winning interior designer in North America. They both have traveled to all continents and started an online business selling cookware, spices, and home decor from their journeys, and they later set up retail outlets in major cities in North America.

Your "client" needs your help in creating an editorial calendar for a new blog and social media content that announces the opening of the new stores and celebrates different holidays and religions in its new market, which reflect the multicultural diversity of the country's population. The company wants to appeal to diverse consumers at different stages of life— young professionals setting up their first home, newlyweds, and parents. The retailer sells low budget to higher-end products, many of which would be hard to find elsewhere.

Facts of interest on ethnicity, religion, holidays, and special events in Canada:

- Immigration and ethnicity in Canada: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca>
- Religions in Canada: <http://www.thecanadaguide.com/culture/religion/>
- Holidays in Canada: <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/canada/>
- Special events in Toronto: <https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/>

festivals-events/

- Special events in Vancouver: <https://www.tourismvancouver.com/events/festivals-and-events/>

Deliverables:

1. Create a 12-month Editorial Calendar for the Canadian Market.

Develop content for a new blog that provides how-to advice and tips on decorating one's home and celebrating holidays and special events in Canada, as outlined in required topics. Give the blog a creative name and prepare an editorial calendar for a 12-month period, with three different story ideas for every month of appeal to this market. You can make up guest bloggers and add expert advice from the founders for some of the topics. Think about tips, fun trivia, and top ways to make things better or simpler. Write a headline for each story idea and a brief description (using full sentences) of two to four lines. Please use the template posted on Sakai.

Required Topics: The blog calendar must include the following events and holidays that tie in social gatherings, cooking, celebrations, holidays, decorating, and the seasons:

- Acknowledgement of the opening dates of the two new stores in Canada;
- Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holidays, as well as Lunar New Year, Vesak Day, and Diwali;
- Secular holidays, such as Thanksgiving and National Indigenous Peoples Day;
- National holidays celebrated in Canada, such as Victoria Day;
- Special events in both cities that celebrate Canada's culture and diversity, as well as the LGBTQ community.

2. Develop Examples of Social Media Content for the Canadian Market.

Create content for a variety of social media that would position the retailer

as the go-to source for advice on home décor and recipes for special occasions and holidays for its multicultural markets. You will have to use your imagination and find relevant images online—and identify special occasions and holidays in the country. Remember the retailer is trying to sell its products—but use a soft sell approach. Please address the country’s diverse audiences and religions, as well as holidays and special events. Refer to the blog calendar for ideas on topics.

Prepare content for each of the following social media platforms targeted to the country:

- Twitter (three tweets with a maximum of 280 characters and proposed handle and hashtags plus image)
- Facebook (three posts with images, hashtag, and copy with full sentences)
- Instagram (three posts with image, hashtag, and copy with full sentences)
- YouTube (concept for three different videos; describe in full sentences—visuals, story concept, and storytellers/spokespeople)

English: Reset the Review/Language setting to English (Canada). In the real world, the copy would be edited to Canadian English, which mostly uses Oxford English spelling, along with a French-language version. Apply such writing characteristics as culturally appropriate and respectful language; authentic and human tone, not institutionalized and hard sell; helpful and engaging tips and news; and relatable verbal and visual content for people to like, share, comment, or bookmark. See Sakai Resources/Social Media for links to articles about creating social media content for businesses and developing verbal and visual content for international audiences. Refer to your stylebook for usage of terms (gender, race, and religion, etc.).

Implementation of Active Learning Techniques in an Undergraduate Public Relations Course: Comparing Individual Social Networks and Brand Communities

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This paper describes an in-class social network mapping activity that serves as an overview of social identity and social objects—the building blocks of a social network. Active learning techniques were used to introduce the concept of personal networks, brand communities, and the role of public relations professionals in fostering relationships. The social network mapping activity illustrated the application of the following theories: Travers and Milgram's (1969) "the small world problem," Tajfel's social identity theory (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Granovetter's (1973) "strength of weak ties." It prompted students to consider which individuals are in their networks and how they are connected through unique social objects. Furthermore, they determined where audiences overlap and weaker network ties reside and related these connections to the development and nurturing of a brand community. Through active learning exercises that included quick-writes and manual social networking mapping, students visualized how various connections use social objects to create communities. They ultimately learned that messages spread further and faster when shared through weak ties that bridge otherwise unconnected communities.

Keywords: social network mapping, social objects, social identity, interactive learning, active learning, brand community, public relations coursework, undergraduate teaching

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“Social networks are . . . full of unexpected strands linking individuals seemingly far removed from one another in physical or social space” (Travers & Milgram, 1969, p. 426).

Made popular by the “six degrees of Kevin Bacon” trivia game measuring the number of degrees of separation between any actor or actress and the actor Kevin Bacon (Fass et al., 1996), the theory commonly known as “six degrees of separation” posits that any two people on the planet are within six connections of each other (Witkop, 2019). The original study, “The Small World Problem” (Travers & Milgram, 1969), shows us the grand, complex interconnectedness in our society.

To expand this concept from a random, connect-the-dots game to an analysis of the many ties that bind us and the communities formed around these ties, the author conducted an in-class activity comparing an individual social network to a brand community. Mapping and analyzing unique social networks teaches people where and how we are connected with one another. Relationships are an integral part of the public relations industry. When researchers and students expand on the idea of the individual social network and consider the broader social network of a brand or product, valuable insight is gained into the publics a company seeks to reach.

Literature Review

Social Identity and Social Objects

An individual’s sense of self relies on the other individuals in his/her circle. One’s desire to create and foster personal connections and to “belong to a particular community, and behave according to the established norms and values” (Martínez-López et al., 2015, p. 173) is at the core of social identification. The faintest sense of social connectedness, even with people that we classify as strangers, influences the adoption of others’ interests and goals as our own (Walton et al., 2012).

The central tenet of Tajfel's social identity theory is that groups are "a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Social identity theory further suggests that individuals create ties that form social networks (communities) when they are similarly enthusiastic about something beyond themselves. The "social category membership" described by Tajfel is a community, inspired through conversation and sharing of some object, creating a human connection between two people. This "social object" (McCleod, 2008) can be anything—from archery to zombies—and is the reason we become part of any social network.

Social Networks and Social Network Mapping

A "network" is by definition a "structured pattern of relationships typified by reciprocal patterns of communication and exchange" (Stephenson, 1999, p. 7-41). To that end, a "social network" is a set of actors (or nodes) that may have relationships (or ties) with one another (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005).

Zhao et al. (2012) explored communities based upon the social objects that link their members. The results of their study suggest that the stronger the tie, the more commonalities there will be to connect the nodes with the ties. An individual and his best friend, therefore, likely share more common bonds than he and his manager.

Mapping social networks serves to visualize the seemingly invisible network of our relationships (Chan & Liebowitz, 2006) and illustrates the structure of our culture (Stephenson, 1999). How one relates and interacts with their diverse network of communities affects the way the member identifies with any single community (Heere et al., 2011). This social phenomenon can be defined through an individual and his/her personal network or, on a larger scale, an organization and the employees making up various departments and a brand and the communities interested in its product(s). A form of network mapping called "knowledge

mapping” (Chan & Liebowitz, 2006) is used in organizations to enhance collaborative learning outcomes or to match an individual with a department where his/her knowledge is most relevant.

Brand Communities

Just as individuals are driven by social objects to form a social network, members interact via social objects to develop brand communities (Zaglia, 2013). Seemingly disparate communities can emerge around an identical brand. According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), awareness of the “structured set of social relations” (p. 412) among members of a brand community expedites an organization’s ability to develop and cultivate deep consumer relationships.

Members participate in brand communities in a manner akin to participation in social networks, as the goal in both cases is to find people with similar interests and skills, to foster emotional support and encouragement, or, perhaps, to solve a problem. It can be argued that a social object or a brand that brings members together is at least as important as the link itself (Zhao et al., 2012) and that networks are strongest when everyone is playing a valuable role (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

The Strength of Weak Ties

From Austin’s theory of sovereignty to Malcolm Gladwell’s *Tipping Point*, we are conditioned to believe that we are lemmings, following a hierarchy centered on a single person of tremendous influence (Dewey, 1894; Gladwell, 2000). Indeed, extant studies suggest it is not necessarily the nodes within a network that help disseminate the most information at the greatest speed; rather, it is the properties of the network as a whole that make the difference (Granovetter, 1973; Watts, 2011). In his book, *Everything is Obvious**, Watts (2011) posited, “when influence is spread via some contagious process, the outcome depends far more on the overall structure of the network than on the properties of the

individuals who trigger it” (p. 96).

More than four decades ago, Granovetter (1973) suggested that “strong ties” are “positive and symmetric,” meaning that the relationship is supported by a combination of time, intimacy, and reciprocation of knowledge (p. 1,361). This conceptualization prompts us to consider those to whom we are “weakly tied” as members of social circles other than ours, although we are somewhat connected to these individuals through network overlaps. The bridges between individuals in different social circles (the “weak ties”) are the key to the spread of information because they have access to information different from that being disseminated in our immediate network and thus provide new social objects with which to connect.

Communication professionals tend to focus on leveraging strong ties; however, research shows that individuals linked via weak ties make up more cohesive communities that can spread a common message with greater speed, ease, and influence (Granovetter, 1973; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Watts, 2011; Wu et al., 2004).

Understanding where our friendship circles overlap and being aware of our extended network—i.e., individuals with whom we have weaker ties—can help generate new ideas and disseminate more knowledge. In the words of Walker Smith (2012), “Weak ties are not bad; they’re just weak” (para. 17). Weak ties exist with acquaintances with whom we can potentially network.

Method

Participants

Among the 11 participants in the activity described in this work are four male and seven female junior- and senior-level college students enrolled in a face-to-face 300-level communications course taught over a six-week summer session at a large public university in Washington State.

About the Course

The Integrated Strategic Communication program at Washington State University emphasizes writing, research, and management principles throughout the course of study. This class, Public Relations Principles and Practices, focuses on the theory and practice of public relations, its function in organizations, and its role in society. The course mirrors the communication industry in that students are required to be creative, empathetic, collaborative and persuasive in their delivery of written and oral information.

Student Learning Outcomes

This activity is based on the curriculum shared by Nancy White (2010) of Full Circle Associates in KS Toolkit and is tailored similarly to a classroom activity taught by Dr. Matt Kushin (2015) in an undergraduate social media course at Shepherd University. We focus specifically on learning about community on both an individual and organizational level and visualize how links found within areas where audiences overlap are where the richest information is disseminated most rapidly. Through a simple individual social network mapping exercise, students can see how their various connections create communities centered around social objects and apply that concept to a brand and its brand community. Understanding brand audiences, brand communities, and the properties of these networks, along with considering how different communities overlap, helps students learn how to create audience-centric messages that improve consumer relationships and increase public relations task effectiveness.

Activity

Class Period One

On Day One, the class learned about social identity and social objects through the discussion of Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory and the concept of "social objects" as described by MacLeod (2017). Then

Finally, three volunteers transcribed their networks to the whiteboard next to one another and drew lines to connect the individuals in different communities that knew one another (Figure 2). This allowed the class to visualize how communities overlap, prompting the discussion on the “small world” phenomenon (Travers & Milgram, 1969). It quickly becomes apparent that we are not living in silos; rather, our community is linked both directly and indirectly with other communities. Furthermore, these links can serve as windows into our relationships within the focal community, teaching us why we identify with the focal community.

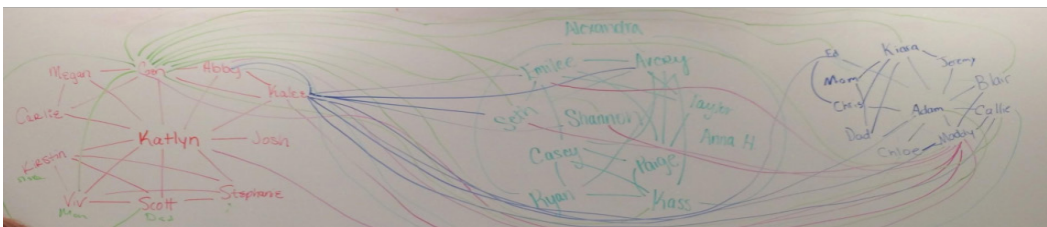


Figure 2. Example of comparative social network maps created by students.

Class Period Two

At the start of Day Two, students were asked to produce a “quick-write” statement, reflecting on the mapping activity from Day 1, and share what they have written with the class. “Quick writes,” usually followed by sharing content orally, is an instructional tool that serves as a basis for more collaborative learning activities (Shen, n.d.; Yost, 2019).

After discussing personal experiences regarding the social mapping exercise, the class explored the definition of public relations as published by the Public Relations Society of America (n.d.), which states that “public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other” (para. 2), followed by a review of the function of public relations as a part of the broader concept of integrated strategic communication. In this particular case, the conversation focused on the

industry, its sub-functions, and the general idea that PR professionals build relationships between an organization and its key audiences through their actions and communication.

A second quick-write followed, serving to book-end the conversation, with time to reflect and think critically about the content covered. The prompt for this two-minute reflection was, “What did exploring your social network teach you about public relations?” In their submissions, students shared their observations, which included statements such as, “I hadn’t considered the connections I have with so many people and the different things we connect around,” and “I can compare myself to a brand because I have more than one social network like a brand can have multiple communities.” In other words, most students made the connection between themselves and a brand, social objects, and products, while linking their individual networks to brand communities. After completing the exercise, a number of students felt compelled to reach out to some of their more distant social media acquaintances and venture out of their immediate social networks.

Discussion/Conclusion

Overview

Although it may be counterintuitive, information shared with a distant acquaintance will likely spread more effectively than if we shared it with our best friend. We forge the strongest ties with individuals with whom we have the most in common, which generates redundancies within our networks when information is shared. Consequently, reaching out to social media users with whom we have weak ties will be a much more effective means of spreading information among multiple networks (Grannoveter, 1973). This process is analogous to the relationships between brands and brand communities, as by reaching out to members who are on the periphery of a target audience, or by finding a bridge to a new audience through a current community with which strong ties are

already formed, a brand can introduce a message to a new community of potential loyal consumers.

This classroom activity explored the connection between interpersonal social networks and the formation of brand communities. Exploring the individual social network and the connections forged via social objects was a good way to introduce the concept of “brand community,” suggesting that individuals within brand communities are also connected by social objects. Brands will look to their communities to disseminate information and, by analyzing their weak ties, they can nurture their network, foster new communities, and spread a message further and faster.

Pedagogical Implications

Interactive teaching experiences are often more rewarding for students as well as teachers. Active engagement not only enhances learning but also makes education more interesting and allows for a much-needed break from traditional classroom lectures (Lumpkin et al., 2015). Rather than being the “sage-on-the-stage,” the instructor can take on the role of “instructional designer,” striving to create a course experience for students that promotes greater knowledge retention and transfer. The learning objectives of this brand community exercise are well-suited for inclusion into student-centered, active pedagogical experiences.

Understanding that we all have social networks with both strong and weak ties can help students appreciate the benefits of nurturing those relationships outside of their immediate community. New ideas are potentially just a bridge away, and analyzing our own social network maps can uncover many opportunities, allowing us to identify our strongest resources and showing us where best to send a message. Similarly, when a brand invests in broad consumer relationships, it increases the value of the brand community and fuels business growth and sustainability.

Future Considerations

An alternative version of this assignment is presented below, followed by a discussion of ways to expand the assignment to other groups and how to adapt the assignment to a large lecture class.

Suggestions for Additional Content

Rather than mapping a network based on their most recent interactions, it might be more beneficial for students to map multiple networks, considering groups like “family,” “work,” “gym,” and “book club.” This exercise would allow them to see how and where their own communities overlap and where available bridges reside, while helping them visualize opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Lesson Expansion

To further increase direct applicability to public relations functions, a social network mapping activity that focuses on a specific brand can be conducted during a second class period. Integrating a social network map into a client’s integrated strategic communications plan can uncover mutually beneficial relationships that can be exploited to achieve maximum communication impact.

Working in groups, students create a social network map for a selected brand, initially through identification of the brand’s community influencers. From there, students expand the map with bridges between the influencers and the brand’s target audiences. When students identify the community influencers (strong ties) within a brand community network and explore the influencer connections (weak ties) to others in diverse audience segments, the resulting network map reinforces Grannoveter’s (1973) “strength of weak ties” theory. The lesson emphasizes that a brand community and an individual community are similar in form and function. Similar to the relationships students discovered through their network maps on Day One, when brands reach out to weaker ties, they have the potential to spread their message further and more rapidly than by solely

nurturing the existing influencers.

Scalability

For larger class sizes, the activities discussed in this paper may be scaled by forming small groups, and asking group members to share their quick-writes, compare their networks, and find links within their groups.

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Public Relations Campaigns: An Integrated Approach

Reviewed by
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Public Relations Campaigns: An Integrated Approach
Authors: Regina M. Luttrell and Luke W. Capizzo
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[https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/public-relations-campaigns/
book249891](https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/public-relations-campaigns/book249891)

In 2006, the Commission for Public Relations Education (CPRE) report recommended public relations programs should include a course on public relations campaigns (DiStaso, 2019). A decade after this recommendation, CPRE released a follow-up report that found undergraduate public relations programs were teaching (92.5%, $n = 186$) and requiring (80.1%, $n = 157$) students to take a course in public relations campaigns (DiStaso, 2019). Furthermore, the 2017 report found that among practitioners, 97.9% ($n = 390$) agreed that a campaigns and case studies class should be required for undergraduate students (DiStaso, 2019). A course in public relations campaigns is an essential part of many undergraduate public relations curricula and can enhance the student experience by giving them an opportunity to complete a campaign for a client.

Given the relevance and importance of courses in public relations campaigns, it is essential that public relations educators have resources available to help students create successful campaign projects grounded in research and theory. *Public Relations Campaigns: An Integrated Approach*

by Regina M. Luttrell and Luke W. Capizzo provides one such useful resource. The book walks students through the public relations process following the ROSTIR model (Research, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics, Implementation, and Reporting) and incorporates emerging models such as the PESO model (paid media, earned media, shared media, and owned media), thus allowing students to see how various media outlets fit into public relations campaigns.

Structure and Organization

The book is organized into an introduction, 11 chapters, appendix, and glossary. As previously mentioned, the book uses the ROSTIR model for campaign planning, and this model provides the organizational structure for the book. In terms of thinking about how to structure a class around this book, it can be organized into two sections. Section 1 can include the Introduction, Chapters 1-3, and Chapter 11 of the book, which provides a comprehensive overview of the necessity of public relations campaigns and provide a big picture look at public relations campaigns through the use of theory, models, and case studies. Chapters 4-10 make up Section 2 where these chapters detail the ROSTIR model with two chapters devoted to research and individual chapters devoted to objectives, strategies, tactics, implementation, and reporting and evaluation.

The introduction, in particular, focuses on public relations theories and principles, and emphasizes the importance of planning campaigns based on sound public relations theory. Some of the theories explained in the introduction include excellence theory, systems theory, agenda setting, two-step flow model, and situational crisis communication theory, among others. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the models of public relations practice and public relations planning. Chapter 1, "Introduction to Integrated Campaigns" explains the ROSTIR model, and provides a rationale for using it. In Chapter 2, Luttrell and Capizzo review the fundamentals of public relations campaigns including an introduction

to the elements of a strategic plan. The third chapter in this section introduces students to the PESO model and how to use the model as part of the campaign planning process. Chapter 11, “Formulating an Integrated Campaign – Case Studies” features six case studies with topics including product marketing, activism, engagement, crisis communication, global and multicultural, and internal communication and employee relations.

The second section of the book, Chapters 4-10, cover the step-by-step process of designing, implementing and evaluating an integrated public relations campaign. Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the research phase of the process. Chapter 4 covers more of the “how-to” of research for public relations campaigns with topics including diagnosing a problem and/or opportunity, research terminology and techniques, and how to conduct secondary and primary research. Chapter 5 focuses primarily on goals associated with public relations campaigns and explains how to set and write campaign goals. Chapter 6, “Objectives” demonstrates how to write SMART objectives. Chapter 7 (“Strategies”) and Chapter 8 (“Tactics”) explain how to choose campaign strategies and tactics within the PESO model. Chapter 7 also includes a section on how to develop strategies for targeted audiences, and Chapter 8 includes specific tactics aligned with the PESO model that students can integrate into their campaigns. Chapter 9, “Implementation” covers project management and tips for how to work with various groups associated with a campaign including the media and non-PR people. This section wraps up with Chapter 10 “Reporting and Evaluation” that cover how to evaluate and report on campaign outcomes. Chapters 4-10 are supplemented by the appendix, which includes more detailed instructions and examples for each step of the ROSTIR model.

Contribution to Public Relations Education

Public Relations Campaigns: An Integrated Approach makes a significant contribution to public relations education, in particular as a

resource for teaching undergraduate public relations campaigns courses. A strength of this book is the utilization of the “Concept Cases” and “Case Studies” that accompany each chapter. These sections provide real-world context to the concepts and steps covered in the previous chapter and effectively expose students to the real-world applications of concepts covered in public relations classes. These case studies use consistent terminology, call back to the PESO model, and identify a theory or model applicable to the case. Applying theory to a public relations campaign can be a difficult concept for students to grasp, so the inclusion of these examples in the textbook is an excellent way to reinforce this skill for students. Furthermore, the emphasis on theory, when it comes to planning campaigns, is useful for instructors.

Recommendations

Public Relations Campaigns: An Integrated Approach would make an ideal text for undergraduate students in a public relations campaigns course. The structure of the book lends itself well to course planning and the resources within the text are useful for students at each stage of a public relations campaigns course. The chapters are concise and detailed as they clearly explain core concepts necessary for planning and implementing a public relations campaign. Furthermore, the inclusion of practical step-by-step instruction and examples is useful for service-learning courses that include client-based work. Luttrell and Capizzo consistently connect theory to practice throughout the text in a way that is easily understandable and applicable. Finally, the inclusion of “Concept Cases” and “Case Studies” with each chapter, along with including an entire chapter devoted to case studies, exposes students to a variety of problems, approaches, and methods used in public relations campaigns.

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Teach Social Media: A Plan for Creating a Course Your Students Will Love

Reviewed by
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Teach Social Media: A Plan for Creating a Course Your Students Will Love
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ISBN: 978-1088489918

www.amazon.com/gp/product/1088489915/

If you didn't know this already, prepare to be shocked. Teaching public relations and strategic communication in this multimodal, multimedia world is a hard job. Beyond grading and the actual physical act of teaching, those of us who profess for a living also have to maintain a connection to industry, understand and manage new trends and platforms (hello, virtual reality, Discord, and TikTok), as well as attempt to make sure we cover the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will need in the "real world." It feels like we can never bridge the gap between what we can teach in our courses (which may be regulated through curriculum committees, accreditation standards, and semester/quarter time constraints) and what practitioners want. The Commission on Public Relations Education's most recent report (2018) noted that employers are concerned about the skills and abilities of incoming practitioners and what they can produce and do with (and without) those competencies. This sentiment echoes what other associations have reported. Lum (2017), in the ANA's Educational Foundation's report on the talent gap, wrote:

College and university curricula cannot keep pace with the rapid change going on in the industry. Course work and textbooks are out of date almost as soon as they're published,

and much that is taught about marketing and communications is outdated and unrelated to management expectations and students' actual experience in the field. (p. 2)

Social media is one of those skill sets that many employers desire and professors must teach. Several academics, such as Sandra Duhe, Karen Freberg, and Carolyn Mae Kim, have written books that provide guidance on social media best practices, campaign development, message development and theory. What has been lacking is how instructors deploy these into a classroom environment. How should social media be taught, and what content, strategies, and approaches can we use in the classroom to not only teach social media but have students apply it? A new addition to that crop of books is Matt Kushin's *Teach Social Media*, a tome that doesn't traverse the same material as earlier books.

Contributions of the Book

Thanks to Kushin, we have a new book that fills the missing piece on classroom deployment. For a long time, Kushin has generously shared his time and expertise via his blog, and now this book fleshes out how to operate and manage a social media class. *Teach Social Media* builds a bridge between the university curricula and the demands of your classroom. *Teach Social Media* is a teaching preparation guidebook that offers a template for laddering students' theoretical knowledge, application skills, and implementation capabilities. Few academics learned how to teach emerging social media or how to develop a social media class in an ever-evolving media environment. These factors collide when we are asked to lead, take over, and develop a social media course. The genius of this book is that Kushin walks you through the phases of the class from the start when you, as the professor, are determining what you want your students to learn through each week of the semester. *Teach Social Media* is not focused on the how-to's of social media, nor is it a highly theoretical tome. It's a book that offers the fundamentals for scaffolding and

implementing an introductory social media course. It provides adaptable, ready-to-use class lectures and assignments on learning outcomes focused on knowledge, skills, and abilities to guide the course and each lesson.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Book

One of the strengths of the book is the format of each chapter. Building a new course is challenging. Luckily, Kushin lays out a 15-week semester plan for the reader. The first chapter acclimates the reader. Each subsequent chapter follows a pattern; also, each chapter has a full appendix. Applying theory and practice into courses is what many of us claim to do. Kushin offers a framework that encapsulates contemplation, reflection, and action. The WWHDR framework presented with each unit provides the professor with a way to plan his or her lessons. Some teaching books drown you in theory and case. This book encourages interactivity with the text. The goal with the book and Kushin's overall philosophy is not to just acquire knowledge but to put that knowledge into constructive and beneficial use. The strategy chapter (Chapter 5) and the onboarding chapter (Chapter 1) were eye-openers. Rarely does one get the chance to see how others assimilate the students to a course or teach strategy. It was refreshing to see how his thinking takes the first days of class away from the standard "introduce yourself and review the syllabus" into substantive discussions about the structure of the course and the overarching "why" guiding the class.

One of the book's weaknesses is accessibility. What I liked about the book (and I bought the hard copy edition via Amazon) is you have ebook access, which includes all assignments mentioned in the book. However, only Kindle users will have access to the ebook, which is great for Amazon book users but frustratingly terrible for others. The book does not have an index, which makes it difficult if you need to zoom to a particular place. For several years there have been broader discussions about trolling (#yourslipisshowing as an early example that is still relevant

today), race and diversity in Web 2.0, and digital blackface. Given the issues with memes from a branding and a diversity aspect, I do wish that these matters had been covered in the course materials. Our students will act as brand ambassadors and communicators, and these matters are real-life, real-time situations they will need to diagnose, manage, or extinguish. Giving students and ourselves more room to work through these issues while in praxis is undeniably vital to the enterprises of teaching and public relations.

Who Would Benefit from Reading this Book?

A lot of books overpromise and under-deliver. Kushin's work is the reverse: he under-promises and over-delivers in a concise volume that should be on every public relations professor's shelf. This is a teaching text with an abundance of resources, templates, and classroom strategies. Matt Kushin's book is a godsend for seasoned social media professors redeveloping their social media courses or newbie academics who are incorporating social and digital projects into their classes. The book is a step-by-step course plan for anyone teaching a social media class, and I would argue that some of the assignments can be reconfigured for a writing or research class. Even the most adept professor can learn new things from this text. I know I have, and I cannot wait to put them into practice in my own (non-social media) classes.

References

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