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Note from the Editor-in-Chief:
We are pleased to welcome several new JPRE board members this summer, who are listed on the following page along with the entire board. We thank all our board members for their service as reviewers, supporters, and problem solvers.

The editorial team listed above, which gained a new member in Dr. Eaddy, donated countless hours of effort into this issue. Their assistance is priceless, and I am grateful for their brilliant minds, their willingness to serve, and their incredible work ethic.

Thank you to those who have reviewed manuscripts for JPRE this year. You each completed a valuable service to the field, and it is appreciated.

Thank you to Gini Dietrich, author of *Spin Sucks*, for allowing us to use her PESO model graphic in this issue. We are appreciative of that permission. I gain so much from her podcasts, so I was pleased to have her work featured in a GIFT in this issue.

This fall, we look forward to publishing a special issue in collaboration with the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication with guest editor Denise Bortree.

This is my final regular issue to publish while serving as editor-in-chief. It has been an honor.

Journal of Public Relations Education
Editorial Review Board

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Media Literacy Among Public Relations Students: An Analysis of Future PR Professionals in the Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses various aspects of media literacy among a national sample of 727 public relations students from 115 U.S. colleges and universities. Student definitions of media literacy transcended basic interpretation of messages and extended to higher-level concepts such as understanding and vetting messages and how media organizations operate. PR students considered themselves to be fairly media literate, including their ability to consume media content critically. Implications for public relations educators are discussed.

Keywords: media literacy, student attitudes, media effects, disinformation, public relations

The previously obscure term *post-truth* gained so much message momentum over the past several years that in 2016, the Oxford Dictionary declared it Word of the Year (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Post-truth, which often is used to refer to political discourse and mediated messages—including fake news—places the goal of persuasion above the need to be accurate and truthful. The recommended antidote-of-choice to combat post-truth communication in today's fast-paced society and against today's fragmented media horizon is media literacy, which is itself a complex phenomenon, but one that is believed to hold promise for an optimally informed citizenry and functioning democracy.

U.S President Donald Trump did much to popularize the term "fake news" when he used it to describe negative news coverage of him during the 2016 presidential campaign and after his election. For example, after Trump's inauguration ceremony, the media disputed whether the actual audience size was accurately reflected in Trump's description of the enormous crowd (Robertson & Farley, 2017). According to an NPR story, Keith (2018) reports that from January 2017 to August 2018, Trump's tweets about news information that he deems "fake," "phoney," or "fake news" increased over time both in scope and frequency. He has tweeted about "fake books," "fake dossier," "Fake CNN," and "fudged news reports." An NPR analysis of Trump's tweets found that he included the words "fake news" in 389 posts during this time frame (Keith, 2018). Not only has media content been called into question, but trusted news organizations also have been labeled as "fake news" providers.

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (Ries et al., 2018), 63% of Americans indicate they have trouble distinguishing "real news" from "fake news." The fake news label not only confuses the public but also raises critical questions for educators preparing students to enter the media industry. In response to the recent emphasis on fake news, some scholars have suggested that media literacy training is imperative (Hobbs, 2017;

Silverman, 2018). To answer this call, the current study investigates levels of self-reported media literacy found among a national sample of public relations students, examines their attitudes toward news media literacy, and explores their definition of media literacy in the context of fake news.

Literature Review

Understanding students' notion of what news is and what news is not will help PR educators better prepare future practitioners to work in this new and rocky media landscape. Thus, it is important to consider the existing framework of fake news, post-truth communication, and media literacy.

Fake News

Regardless of whether the news coverage of Trump is accurate, the connotative meaning for audience members of the term "fake news" is likely associated as false, untruthful, or misleading information. Although "fake news" is a decades-old term, issues of media trust and credibility have experienced renewed societal emphasis (see Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017). Rini (2017) discovered that fake news is more than just intentional lying. The motives are often complex, and intent may vary. Rini (2017) offered the following definition of fake news:

> A fake news story is one that purports to describe events in the real world, typically by mimicking the conventions of traditional media reportage, yet is known by its creators to be significantly false, and is transmitted with the goals of being widely re-transmitted and deceiving at least some of its audience. (p. E45)

In the era of yellow journalism, journalism and politics often were intertwined, and the line between editorial content and promotion was blurred. So-called yellow journalism (Office of the Historian, n.d.), which favored sensationalism over well-researched facts, was the norm. In his history of the New York press, Sidney Pomerantz wrote that late 19th century New Yorkers were sick of fake news (Pomerantz, 1958).

In 1910, the first journalism industry code of ethics was created in New York (McKerns, 1976) and similar codes eventually were adopted by the press nationally. These codes emphasized the journalistic values of truth, accuracy, and objectivity. Ultimately, the press would serve a fourth-estate duty as a check on government.

Today, the convergence of media allows for quick dissemination and re-dissemination of both "truthful" and "fake news" stories, which affects the veracity of information (Conill, 2016). According to Samuel (2016):

> The internet may have made fake news a bigger problem, and it certainly has made it a more complicated problem to tackle, but there is a longstanding tension between a public interest in conscientious reporting and private interests in salacious headlines and easy profits. (para. 25)

Online, the "fake news" problem is compounded due to a number of factors that make it difficult to determine source accuracy, including the ability to self-publish, sponsored posts, personal blogs, lack of bylines, promoted stories, and native advertising. Click-bait and headlines that often lead to sensationalized stories earn advertising revenue (Perloff, 2020). "Fake news" stories often are unknowingly (and sometimes knowingly) shared by the public on social media. A BuzzFeed analysis found that during the 2016 presidential election, the "Top 20 Fake News" stories received more engagement than the "Top 20 Legitimate News" stories from 19 trusted news outlets (Silverman, 2016). Recent news media scandals may point to a shift in news values. Stories of news outlets involved in plagiarism, leaked information, propaganda, lack of fact checking, and fabricated sources contribute to public distrust of the industry.

Post-Truth

Many scholars contend that fake news is a function of the post-

truth political era in which we now live (see, for example, Andersen, 2017; Davies, 2016; Lewandowsky et al., 2017). In post-truth politics, campaign information feeds the sensational nature of news and is framed by appeals to emotion over policy details. Politicians tend to focus on talking points, even when contradiction or questioning by the media occurs. Twenty-four-hour news outlets and the ambiguous nature of social media have helped to create a post-truth culture. Harsin (2015) penned the phrase "the regime of post truth" to describe the many contributing variables, including microtargeting with strategic use of false information or rumors; media gatekeeper fragmentation; news media scandals; information overload; user-generated content; lack of trusted authorities; and algorithms governing social media rankings and searches (p. 327). This study examines a generation of students that has come of age during the post-truth era and examines their ability and understanding regarding news media literacy.

Media Literacy

Simply defined, media literacy is the ability to access, analyze and evaluate communication (Aufderheide, 1993; Hobbs, 2006). News media literacy is a subset of the broader field of media literacy (Ashley et. al, 2013) and also intersects with digital literacy and civic literacy (Maksl et al., 2017). Malik and colleagues (2013) stated that the definition should include understanding the role that news plays in society, the motivations consumers have to seek out news, the ability to find and recognize news, the ability to critically evaluate news and the ability to create news. Austin et al. (2007) found that media literacy training can impact attitudes and reduce risky behaviors. They also noted that media literacy training can change the way individuals consider media portrayals and can increase awareness of advertising efforts.

According to Schilder et al. (2016), researchers across many countries have taken widely different approaches to assess aspects of

media literacy among various populations. Instruments include those that test news knowledge and current events, gauge attitudes toward media and media organizations, explore how media messages are created and disseminated, and probe "higher order" issues regarding the role and importance of media and news in a democratic society (Schilder et al., 2016). Specialized tests of media literacy have included those about health media literacy (Bergsma & Carney, 2008; Harper, 2017), alcohol media literacy (Eintraub et al., 1997), and other subjects. The instrument used in the current study was itself an example of a specialized media literacy test, having its origins in a study by Primack et al. (2009) of consumer media literacy about smoking. The smoking media literacy framework contained the core concepts of authors and audiences (AA), which included items about consumer targeting and the profit motive; messages and meanings (MM), which addressed points of view, message interpretation and the effect of messages; and representation and reality (RR), which included items about media filtering of information and omission of information.

In an attempt to validate a media literacy scale proposed by Ashley et al. (2013) and to expand its scope, Vraga and colleagues (2015) tested a 27-item 7-point Likert scale across two samples (undergraduate communication students and adults). Their scale contained five underlying dimensions based on prior work (Ashley et al., 2013; Vraga et al., 2015), including dimensions that measure individuals' self-perception of media literacy and dimensions that measure opinions about the value of news media literacy for society.

The study by Vraga et al. (2015), which is partially replicated in this study, involved mostly first-year college students enrolled in either a public speaking course or an interpersonal communication course. The study revealed that the value of media literacy (VML) was a good predictor of news media knowledge, knowledge of current events, and skepticism toward the news media as a whole. Those who more strongly

valued news media literacy were more likely to have greater news media knowledge and greater knowledge of current events, as well as more skepticism toward the news. Understanding of AA was positively related to news knowledge, while MM, RR and self-perceived media literacy (SPML) showed no effect on news media knowledge, current event knowledge, or skepticism.

Kendrick and Fullerton (2018) conducted a national survey of American Advertising Federation student members to assess their media literacy using Vraga's (2015) scale. Students in the advertising study exhibited higher degrees of understanding and interest in the MM and AA dimensions than they did in the VML. Students with higher grade point averages and access to internships placed a higher value on media literacy than other groups of advertising students.

Scholars who attempt to measure media literacy often include scales intended to assess how literate their respondents are in terms of media *consumption* separate from media prosumption, which involves producing consumer messages (see Lin et al., 2013). Toffler (1980) used the term prosumption to highlight the blurring of roles between consumers and producers, and media researchers among others have perpetuated the term in studies involving consumer production and co-production of media content. Using a sample of more than 1,200 Turkish adults, Koc and Barut (2016) applied a 35-item new media literacy instrument that differentiated between abilities to consume content versus create content and also between the presence of digital media skills and the use of critical thinking. The result was an instrument that included items about functional consumption, functional prosumption, critical consumption, and critical prosumption of digital media messages. The current study utilizes the Koc and Barut (2016) critical consumption sub-scale to further understand how public relations students consume and understand digital media content.

For future communication professionals, media literacy is

important not only for critically analyzing messages, but also for learning to create public relations messages, advertising copy, audio recordings, video packages, and multimedia content. According to Wyatt (2006), media literacy has the potential to serve as a trust builder for professionals. With the audience at the mercy of the fake news/post-truth environment, tools for helping the public distinguish between truthful and misleading content are needed, and public relations practitioners play an important role in this service to civil society.

Research Questions

Recognizing that public relations education has a key role to play toward resolving what some have called a fake news crisis (Lévy, 2019), PR instructors need to know more about the levels of media literacy among their students. By way of a survey of PRSSA members from across the United States, this study provides insights about how current PR students understand, perceive, critically consume, and define news media by way of the following research questions:

1. What levels of media literacy are held by public relations students in U.S. colleges and universities?
2. Do levels of media literacy vary among students according to demographic or other variables, such as political orientation?
3. How do public relations students define media literacy?

Method

This study employed a national online public relations student survey via the SurveyMonkey platform. The survey was funded by a grant from the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication at Pennsylvania State University. Two methods of data collection were employed. On April 25, 2018, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) sent an email invitation to 360 student chapter (Public Relations Student Society of America or PRSSA) presidents with a link to the survey, asking them to complete the survey and share the link with

chapter members. This collection method resulted in 331 responses. On May 1, 2018, a second email invitation was sent to an additional 3,000 randomly selected PRSSA members via the internal SurveyMonkey email invitation system. This method resulted in an additional 624 responses. Data collectors were configured to prevent students from taking the survey more than once. Both invitations included an incentive for a $5 Starbucks gift card for completing the survey. While 955 students responded, only 727 students from 115 schools completed the survey and received the Starbucks electronic gift card. The 727 completed responses make up the sample for this study.

The questionnaire was designed to gather information about students' academic year, career preferences, demographic profile, internships, mentoring, and plans after graduating college. Using three validated instruments, the current study also measured multiple aspects of media literacy among U.S. college public relations students. By way of an instrument from studies by Vraga et al. (2015) and Ashley et al. (2013), public relations students' news media literacy was assessed, along with an instrument from Koc and Barut (2016) measuring critical consumption of digital media. Taken together, the measurement of public relations students' self-perceived media literacy, value of media literacy, and critical consumption of digital media provided a first-of-its-kind look at the ability of an arguably media-sophisticated audience to differentiate and categorize various media content.

Results

Respondent Profile

The national sample was predominantly female (90.6%), which is in line with estimates of gender representation in specific U.S. public relations programs (Morgan, 2013). Most of the students in the study (87.8%) identified as public relations/strategic communication majors. Their age ranged from 18 to 52 with a median age of 21 years. The

average self-reported overall GPA was 3.50 on a 4.0 scale. In terms of year in school, 34.9% were seniors, 34.3% were juniors, 21.9% were sophomores, and 8.9% were first-year students.

Participants were asked with which race they most identified and were allowed to choose more than one. In response, 80.2% of the students indicated they were White non-Hispanic, 11.0% Hispanic, 6.3% African American, 5.9% Asian American, .6% Pacific Islander and .4% Native American. About 1% indicated they were international students (non-U.S. citizens). Only 6% of the students worked on the annual Bateman national case study competition (Public Relations Student Society of America, n.d.).

RQ 1: What levels of media literacy are held by public relations students in U.S. colleges and universities?

Four scales were used to evaluate media literacy. The first was a 13-item scale developed by Ashley and colleagues (2013), which measured news media literacy by focusing on three latent dimensions: how authors target audiences, the values and production techniques that appeal to different viewers, and how the filtering of information in the media affects perceptions of reality. In this study, the scale was used in total by combining the 13 items into one news media literacy variable. The sub-scales—authors and audiences (AA), messages and meanings (MM), and representation and reality (RR)—were not individually analyzed in this study because their internal reliability was weak. The researchers determined that one holistic scale of news media literacy, which achieved an acceptable alpha score of .78, was the most appropriate level of analysis. The news media literacy variable produced an overall mean score of 4.19 on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree (see Table 1), indicating that the sample, as a whole, felt fairly adept at news media literacy.

Self-perceived media literacy (SPML) and value of media literacy

(VML) were measured using Vraga and colleagues' (2015) adjusted scale, which allows researchers to measure notions of self-efficacy and competence related to media literacy. SPML produced an alpha score of .70 and a mean score of 3.87 on a 5-point scale, while the mean score for VML (alpha = .69) was 4.20 (see Table 1). Finally, Koc and Barut's (2016) critical consumption (CC) scale was used to measure public relations students' ability to criticize digital content. The CC scale produced the strongest internal reliability (alpha = .82) and a mean score of 3.90 on a 5-point Likert scale (see Table 1).

RQ 2: Do levels of media literacy vary among students according to demographic or other variables, such as political orientation?

Very few significant differences were found on any of the media literacy variables among demographic subgroups, including gender, age, race (Caucasian versus non-Caucasian), year in school, GPA, and participation in PRSSA's Bateman competition. A weak, yet significant, relationship was found between self-reported GPA and value of media literacy ($r = .10$; $p = .007$), indicating that students with higher GPAs had a higher perceived importance of media literacy than others with lower GPAs. Similarly, older students were somewhat more likely to perceive themselves as more media literate than their younger counterparts ($r = .07$; $p = .04$).

Students were asked at the end of the survey to place themselves on a 7-point scale based on their political views, with extremely liberal at 1 and extremely conservative at 7. Weak, yet significant, inverse relationships were found for SPML ($r = - 10$; $p = .006$) and VML ($r = -.13$; $p = .0001$), indicating that students who considered themselves more liberal also perceived themselves as being more media literate and held a higher value for media literacy in society.

RQ 3: How do public relations students define media literacy?

Answers to the open-ended question regarding the definition of

media literacy were coded using the analysis software NVivo11. Within NVivo, nodes are a place to collect references to a specific theme. Nodes were first established based on an analysis of a random sample of the data and a brief overview of the literature to identify themes related to media literacy such as understanding and knowledge. Participants' answers could be coded in more than one category to account for longer and more complex responses.

The most mentioned aspects in definitions of media literacy were "understanding," "analyzing," and "knowledge." Half of the students (49.4%, $n = 359$) explained that media literacy implies an understanding of the media and its various components. Respondents pointed out that being media literate means that one understands how media outlets work and is able to use media tools to communicate or send a message. They also mentioned that being media literate helps to understand the power of media. More specifically, media literacy entails understanding the power of the media and the importance in society. More than one-in-five (22.3%, $n = 162$) remarked that media literacy implies analyzing and/or interpreting media messages and narratives. Media literacy provides tools to make sense of media messages. Being media literate implies that people are active participants when receiving media messages. According to these answers, media literacy allows people to be critical of what they see or read. In particular, media literacy is important in distinguishing between true information and fabricated messages.

Another one-fifth (21.6%, $n = 159$) used the word "knowledge" to describe the meaning of media literacy. Public relations students associate media literacy with knowing about and understanding the inner workings of the media and how media messages are created. In general, participants explained that media literacy deals with understanding/knowing all forms of media, not just one. Just slightly fewer (18.9%, $n = 137$) associated media literacy with the creation of media content. Slightly more than one-

eighth (13.7%, *n* = 100) of respondents associated media literacy with using media outlets and specifically knowing how to use media outlets to communicate. Media literacy can provide both an understanding and appreciation for media content creation and distribution. Respondents sometimes explained that media communication is targeted at a specific or a large audience and that a literate media user and creator knows how to navigate the difference. Another 12% (*n* = 87) explained that the media can be deceiving and that media literacy protects against biases and misleading media strategies. These respondents indicated that media literacy can serve as an important tool for distinguishing between true information and fabricated messages.

Discussion

Contemporary public relations students are living in a post-truth era. U.S. college students have grown up experiencing a convergence of news media and a blurring of sensational and truthful news content. Scholars have suggested one way to impact media attitudes and to crystalize understanding of news content is through media literacy training. Thus, it is important to understand how U.S. public relations students view media literacy.

This study assessed how U.S. public relations students define media literacy, the degree to which they believe they possess media literacy, and the importance they attribute to it. There were no significant differences among the demographic variables of gender, age, race, competition team participation, and year in school. Most categorical subgroups of public relations students did not exhibit differences in attitude. However, significant differences were found with the variables of GPA and political leaning.

Judgments about PR students' own degrees of media literacy on three attitudinal scales (news media literacy, self-perceived media literacy, and critical consumption) indicated that public relations students consider

themselves fairly competent overall, with composite scores hovering around a 4 on a 5-point scale. The researchers found a positive correlation with GPA—those who self-reported higher GPAs felt they were more media literate. The importance attached to media literacy (VML) again was about a 4 on a 5-point scale, with those who said they had more liberal political views and higher self-reported GPAs holding VML in higher regard than others. PR students in this study who were more liberal politically also perceived themselves to be more media literate on the SPML scale. The Edelman Trust Barometer (Ries et al., 2018) of U.S. adults also found differences along party lines. In the 2018 Edelman survey, there was a 34-point difference in media trust with Clinton supporters more trusting of the media (61%) than Trump supporters (27%). In this study, students identifying as more liberal (presumably similar to the Clinton supporters) rated themselves higher in media literacy knowledge. Therefore, it seems that individuals who are more trusting of media are also more confident in their media literacy knowledge.

Although politically liberal public relations students with higher GPAs may feel they are media literate, they may not be as adept at identifying fake news as they think they are. Thus, it is important to educate students, especially those who make good grades and may consider themselves part of the liberal elite, that they are as susceptible to fake news as anyone.

Bateman competition students are often the most engaged students in public relations programs. However, this study found they do not perceive themselves as being more media literate. Perhaps, media literacy should be incorporated into Bateman coaching and consideration should be given to how the "client" may counter claims should fake news coverage occur.

Public relations education stresses mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. A key concept is that public

relations is "unseen" as individuals often do not recognize they are being influenced by PR messaging (Holladay & Coombs, 2013). Thus, PR students are taught to craft messages that bypass media gatekeepers, and they are often trained in journalistic style. For these reasons, PR students may feel they are more media literate than others. Feeling more confident in media literacy knowledge, PR students may feel that it is less important to receive media literacy training. This supports the Austin et al. (2007) suggestion that level of skill or involvement impacts understanding of media literacy.

Asked to define the term media literacy, public relations students largely transcended the most basic meaning of the word "literacy"—the ability to read and write —and gravitated toward higher-order words such as "understanding," "knowledge," "analysis," and "operation" of media organizations. Indeed, the academic community is not in agreement over definitions of concepts involving "media" and "literacy." Multiple dimensions and distinctions abound when attempting to operationalize such a heterodox phenomenon. For some, being media literate may mean that one is an active participant in understanding media messages. More than one in five students used words related to "interpretation" of media messages and a deeper understanding, vetting, and contextualization of information apart from simply recognizing its literal meaning.

It may be these interpretive skills beyond simple understanding are the most difficult to measure as well as to teach, as information channels abound and message formats continue to evolve. Repeated references to "different forms" of media in participants' responses reflected the wide range of verbal and visual messages channeled through traditional, digital, and shared formats. If messages are consumed without critical evaluation, they are more likely to be taken at face value, possibly providing a skewed worldview.

Media literacy training can be used to encourage students to be

critical of the news they see and read. However, a fairly small percentage of students (12%) mentioned some aspect of combating "fake news" as a reason to be media literate. Given the post-truth climate, the finding that relatively few students considered the discovery of truth in defining media literacy could be a source of concern. To be media literate, some argue that students must be able to create truthful and well-produced content. Almost one-fifth of respondents (18.9%) associated media literacy with content creation. Some stressed the importance of creating new media content. Indeed, having a working understanding of what separates legitimate news gathering and dissemination from other less credible sources of information is crucial for public relations students.

Implications for PR Educators

Given the lack of a clear definition of media literacy among both scholars and students, it is important to consider the implications for public relations educators. The Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) Code of Ethics focuses on the principles of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness. In the PRSA Code Provision of Conduct (Public Relations Society of America , n.d.), the provision of "Disclosure of Information" calls for public trust-building by revealing all information necessary for decision making. By strengthening public trust, the profession is enhanced. Thus, it is important for public relations students to understand channels of communication and their potential effects. Not only can media literacy help to create more critical consumers of media, but media literacy training also may help move PR students to a position of empowerment. According to Holladay and Coombs (2013), "Media literacy involves recognizing that media messages are constructions (rather than reflections of reality) and understanding who does the constructing and for what purpose" (p. 128). It is important for PR students to consider motivations, values, and decision-making in message creation, whether it is in a press release, a

native advertisement, or some other form. Emphasizing media literacy in the classroom can be a valuable asset in training future public relations professionals.

Media literacy training for public relations students may impact the way they consider transparency in strategic communication messaging. Additionally, media literacy training can help to make public relations students more savvy media consumers. Austin and colleagues (2007) found that media literacy training can change the way individuals think about media. Media literacy education also has been found to increase awareness of advertising efforts to sell products or services. In turn, awareness may influence decision-making and intended behaviors (Austin et al., 2007).

There are many strategies for teaching media in the PR classroom, including exercises to evaluate the credibility of sources, recognize bias in news reporting, identify credible media outlets for daily consumption of news, and how to research using digital archives. Several PR and journalism textbooks, including some free and open access books (for example, *Be Credible* by Bobkowski and Younger, 2018), provide student assignments to improve media literacy skills. Likewise, online resources, such as NewseumED, provide videos and teaching lessons to help students understand and identify fake news. The Public Relations Society of America and the Arthur W. Page Center also provide ethics training modules for use in the classroom. Although resources do exist for public relations educators, how media literacy information is incorporated and how much of the course content is devoted to the topic vary based on the students and their existing knowledge, the course content, and the professor. While the attitudes of educators were not measured in this study, it is possible that they, like the undergraduate students, assume that students studying public relations are, by nature, already media literate. This study revealed that this is not necessarily the case. Thus, educators

should consider the extent that their students understand and value media literacy.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The current study was conducted among a large number of college students who were members of PRSSA, and as such, they do not necessarily represent all public relations students nor other individuals who may pursue careers in that area. Additionally, social desirability bias could have influenced student respondents to respond in certain ways based on guessing the purposes behind the study or how results would be interpreted.

This survey measured self-reported levels of media literacy among public relations students. However, it did not measure PR students' *ability to recognize* fake news or other types of ambiguous content, such as native advertising. Future studies that gauge student competence at distinguishing valid news stories and other legitimate content from disinformation and propaganda would be beneficial. The responsibility to prepare future public relations professionals to practice communications ethically in the public sphere and to knowledgeably navigate the media landscape is essential. Studies such as this one and others that measure specific media literacy skills and abilities could help faculty better execute their educational mission.

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Table 1

Public Relations Student Responses to Media Literacy Scales

	% Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
News Media Literacy (NML)	*a* = .78	**4.19**	**.37**
The owner of a media company influences the content that is produced	82.0	4.07	.76
News companies choose stories based on what will attract the biggest audience	89.0	4.23	.72
Individuals find news sources that reflect their own political values	93.0	4.32	.68
Two people might see the same news story and get different information from it	97.5	4.53	.57
People are influenced by news whether they realize it or not	97.6	4.53	.56
News coverage of a political candidate will influence people's opinions	92.5	4.34	.67
News is designed to attract an audience's attention	90.6	4.29	.73
Lighting is used to make certain people in the news look good or bad	84.2	4.13	.76
Production techniques can be used to influence a viewer's perception	95.9	4.41	.58
When taking pictures, photographers decide what is most important	71.6	3.81	.82
News makes things more dramatic than they really are	55.5	3.60	.85
A news story that has good pictures is more likely to show up in the news	73.9	3.90	.82
A news story about conflict is more likely to be featured prominently	88.9	4.25	.67
Self-Perceived Media Literacy (SPML)	*a* = .70	**3.87**	**.52**
I have a good understanding of the concept of media literacy	74.8	3.81	.83
I have the skills to interpret news messages	90.5	4.16	.58
I understand how news is made in the U.S.	73.5	3.81	.76
I am confident in my ability to judge the quality of news	83.7	4.00	.66
I'm not sure what people mean by media literacy*	16.4	2.40	.98
Value of Media Literacy (VML)	*a* = .69	**4.20**	**.47**
Media literacy is important to democracy	86.4	4.23	.69
People should understand how media companies make decisions about news content	89.8	4.20	.66

It is the role of the press to represent diverse viewpoints	82.0	4.12	.80
The news media have a role to play in informing citizens about civic issues	92.6	4.32	.63
People need to critically engage with news content	83.5	4.14	.73
The main purpose of the news should be to entertain viewers*	10.4	2.07	.95
Critical Consumption (CC)	*a* = .82	**3.90**	**.43**
I can distinguish different functions of media (communication, entertainment, etc.).	96.3	4.32	.56
I am able to determine whether or not media contents have commercial messages.	88.4	4.09	.63
I manage to classify media messages based on their producers, types, purposes and so on.	67.5	3.69	.85
I can compare news and information across different media environments.	89.1	4.09	.64
I can combine media messages with my own opinions.	86.9	4.05	.66
I consider media rating symbols to choose which media contents to use.	39.2	3.16	.98
It is easy for me to make decision about the accuracy of media messages.	71.2	3.75	.79
I am able to analyze positive and negative effects of media contents on individuals.	87.6	4.07	.58
I can evaluate media in terms of legal and ethical rules (copyright, human rights, etc.).	75.4	3.85	.78
I can assess media in terms of credibility, reliability, objectivity and currency.	85.7	4.05	.67
I manage to fend myself from the risks and consequences caused by media contents.	70.5	3.79	.68

*Mean scores calculated on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree."

Perceptions of Mindfulness Among Public Relations Professionals and Students: Similarities, Differences, and Implications for Undergraduate Career Preparation

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness has been studied in many professional and educational environments but not in the public relations workplace. This exploratory study framed in the context of social order uses the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) to separately determine perceptions of mindfulness by public relations professionals and undergraduates preparing for PR careers. Results show professionals and students have strikingly similar perceptions about their work environments. Widespread conceptual clarity about mindfulness was noted. Professionals and undergraduates reported the highest perceptions of mindful awareness in the same four workplace action or response areas. Low perceptions of mindful awareness aligned in three of four lowest-ranked areas. Strong similarities were noted in stressors present in the professional and academic workplaces. Findings support the value of mindfulness intervention in PR career preparation. Recommendations are offered for PR educators, along with suggestions for future scholarly inquiry.

Keywords: mindfulness, public relations, workplace stress, PR education, career preparation

Whether it's mindlessly consuming sugary snacks while working, forgetting a new client's name immediately after being introduced, or fretting over expected criticism from a co-worker, mindfulness in the workplace is an important and understudied issue. Mindfulness should concern public relations professionals as well as those who are preparing undergraduates to enter the profession.

A lack of mindfulness at work can result from—and can at the same time generate—anxiety, guilt, frustration, condemnation and self-doubt (Carroll, 2006). Ultimately, though, what underlies an absence of mindful action is a worker's inability to focus and create a thoughtful and positive outcome from a current-moment situation (Kabat-Zinn, 2001).

Mindfulness has been shown to be valuable in any workplace (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017; Passmore, 2019). It would seem especially relevant in public relations, where professionals work at a fast pace and are expected to generate strategic and creative ideas to build mutual understanding and influence between stakeholders, clients, and colleagues.

This article addresses the extent to which PR professionals and young adults seeking to enter the field understand and act mindfully—remaining thoughtful and calm in the present moment while responding in disciplined, ethical, and beneficial ways. This article presents the results of an exploratory study of PR professionals and junior/senior-level undergraduates planning for public relations careers. Specifically, the study found that there is a widespread, correct understanding of what mindfulness means in a work context. PR professionals and students reported the same kinds of work-related stressors and frustrations. Professionals and students reported their personal perceptions of mindfulness strengths and weaknesses in much the same way. At the same time, half of the professionals and a strong majority of undergraduates did not perceive mindfulness to be relevant to public relations work. Respondents reported almost no systematic mindfulness intervention in

either the professional or academic environment. In other professions and in other academic workplaces, mindfulness interventions have been applied successfully over many years to help people cope with anxiety and stress (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017), but the literature reveals no such effort in public relations.

The purpose of this study is to explore how public relations professionals and undergraduates preparing to enter the field would respond when asked questions about their perceived level of mindfulness at work. Having an understanding of how PR professionals and students grasp their level of mindfulness might lead to more awareness of how to work effectively among today's professionals and those being prepared for the field in the future.

Literature Review

The selection and use of survey instruments and the review of resulting findings was guided by the theoretical construct of social order. In a socially ordered workplace, workers would "share power responsibly, communicate clearly, and work productively together no matter what cultural, economic, social, or technological uncertainties may develop" (Swanson, 2012, p. 134).

Mindfulness as a Concept

Mindfulness is prominent in popular culture. Entertainers, celebrities, and talk show hosts proclaim its calming power (Meola, 2019; Sidelsky, 2011). Professional athletes and coaches credit mindfulness as key to their winning performance (Patel, 2018). Movies and television programs present mindfulness as a life-changing experience (Kost, 2020; Pickert, 2014).

Mindfulness has been interpreted many ways. At its most basic, it involves "being awake and aware—being tuned in to yourself, to others, and to the environment" (Boyatzis & Yeganeth, 2012, p. 4). Mindfulness practice has been called "a time-tested antidote to operating in autopilot"

(Levasseur, 2012, para. 11). Mindfulness means being rooted in the present moment, open to new ideas, and liberated from anxiety, frustration, and self-condemnation (Langer, 1989). Mindfulness means focusing on the processes of life and work more so than the outcome (Serafin, 2007). One of the most popular mindfulness interventions is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a secular practice created in 1979 by physician Jon Kabat-Zinn. MBSR trains participants to detach from their stress, live calmly, and avoid the mental tyranny created by past regrets and future worries (Kabat-Zinn, 2001).

Although mindfulness is not a religious practice, beginning in the late 1960s, its growth in popular culture was fostered by the Dalai Lama, Pema Chödron, and Thich Nhat Hanh. These and other ordained Buddhist teachers advocated mindfulness as a response to the stresses of Western life. Today, at least 14% of American adults profess to use some type of mindfulness practice (Norton, 2018).

Mindfulness is not defined as health care. Still, many advocates claim health benefits and much of the current scholarship focuses on a link to physical health. Some recent clinical studies have demonstrated mindfulness to be effective in counteracting obesity (Caldwell et al., 2012) and diminishing the propensity for alcohol and drug abuse (Wupperman et al., 2012). One study involving MBSR documents its efficacy in reducing the health risks associated with loud noise in the environment (Hede, 2017). Australian health care researchers Mars and Oliver (2016) believe maintaining a state of mindfulness allows the human body to heal itself, thus leading to a variety of personal benefits and potential "sustainability of the health care system" (p. 7).

Mindfulness can be looked at in two ways. *Trait mindfulness* is evidenced as an aspect of a person's disposition (Nilsson & Kazemi, 2016). In that sense, it is associated with personality rather than intentional effort and does not exhibit change due to situational context. *State*

mindfulness is evidenced when a person intentionally cultivates a mindful approach to a perceived challenge. Absent of any challenge, the person's level of mindful awareness may vary (Nilsson & Kazemi, 2016).

It is believed that most people "will have a stable level of trait mindfulness and altering levels of state mindfulness" (Mahmood et al., 2016, para. 4). Participation in a single mindfulness exercise was shown to increase a level of state mindfulness (Luberto & McLeish, 2018). Regardless of whether an individual's level of mindfulness fluctuates or is relatively consistent, in a busy and distracted world, even a slight improvement in mindful attention helps a person to be a more focused and attentive communicator (O'Hara, 2013).

Mindfulness at Work

The quest to learn about, practice, and study the effects of mindfulness has reached the workplace. Mindfulness at work is about critical thinking and not simply about gaining more knowledge (Langer, 1989). A key precept is the idea that all elements of existence are interrelated, or as Elizabeth Mattis-Namgyel (2011) described it, "We cannot find a true boundary or edge to any thing, because all things exist in dependence on other things" (p. 34).

Case study literature documents systematic mindfulness intervention targeting a variety of professionals including athletes (Mehrsafar et al., 2019), auditors (Herda et al., 2019), chemical company workers (Aikens et al., 2014), law school students (Reuben & Sheldon, 2019), nurses (Bazarko et al., 2013; Montanari et al., 2019), and real estate agents (Byrne & Thatchenkery, 2019). Mindfulness interest is especially prominent in the corporate sector. Almost a quarter of all Fortune 500 companies have used mindfulness intervention to reduce workplace anxiety and stress (Wolever et al., 2018). Important questions about workplace mindfulness intervention have been proposed (Castille et al., 2015) and answered (Brown et al., 2007; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017).

Mindfulness in Education

The quest to learn about, practice, and study the effects of mindfulness has also reached the educational sector. Worldwide, a growing body of literature includes thousands of case studies that document mindful thinking and action by students in pre-kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary classrooms (see Semple et al., 2017). Mindfulness intervention has been implemented at the institutional or "whole school" level (Sheinman et al., 2018), as well as at the classroom level (Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Viafora et al., 2015).

In 2007, Richard Burnett and Chris Cullen initiated the Mindfulness in Schools Project to encourage and support the teaching of secular mindfulness in schools (The Mindfulness in Schools Project, 2020). This effort and others have shown mindfulness has great potential to improve student performance "because of its effectiveness in reducing emotional distress and promoting emotional balance, improving attention, and contributing to motivated learning" (Broderick, 2013, para. 9).

The body of literature also offers numerous books and case studies that address mindfulness as a component of teacher preparation (Haynes et al., 2013; Rechtschaffen, 2016). A successful mindful intervention begins with the educator becoming conceptually proficient and then carefully considering how to integrate mindfulness with the institution, curriculum, students, and intended learning outcomes (Hanh & Ware, 2017).

Best Practices for Mindfulness in Education

Many different secular mindfulness intervention strategies have been developed and implemented in academic environments. As with any pedagogical element, mindfulness intervention in higher education must be adapted to the institution, the academic program, the specific curriculum and desired learning outcomes, the students, and the social and cultural norms they identify with. A review of recent case studies of mindfulness intervention in different professional and academic contexts

suggests the following best practices.

Educator Preparation. Mindfulness intervention should only be undertaken when an educator is interested in it, believes in its relevance to learning, and is trained to conduct intervention in the academic environment (Haynes et al., 2013). Training can take months or years and can be expensive. A high level of commitment would be required. An essential element of that training for the educator is the ability to imagine the transformation that mindfulness intervention will bring about in themselves and with their students (Rechtschaffen, 2016).

Mindfulness intervention tends to be a subjective and qualitative intervention and, as such, may be easier to introduce and carry out within the culture and social order of a liberal arts campus than within the culture and social order of a research-based university (Lee, 2012). As with anything presented to students, there is a chance a mindfulness intervention might not go according to plan. Therefore, the educator should be flexible and accommodating (Hanh & Ware, 2017).

Desirable Outcomes. There are many methods for mindfulness intervention. Each has its own structural advantages and disadvantages. Each has the potential for different types of outcomes. The educator should be clear on what is needed in the particular situation so that the most appropriate intervention strategy can be planned. There is strong support for the idea that mindfulness intervention should not be attempted simply to improve productivity. It should allow educators "a more wakeful and authentic way of being with students and colleagues" (Brendel & Cornett-Murtada, 2019, p. 20) and should address the emotional, social, and moral development of all who participate (Hyland, 2017). In that way, intervention would strengthen the social order of the academic workplace.

Intervention Structure. The educator planning a mindfulness intervention should carefully study a variety of established approaches (Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011). Mindfulness intervention is never a one-

size-fits-all response to classroom problems. Each educator must take care to select, plan, and execute an intervention that is right for the situation. Any intervention should ease the burden on students and not add to it.

Some interventions actively teach meditation as the foundation of mindfulness. Others include elements of cognitive behavioral therapy (Kumar et al., 2017). Some engage participants in mental exercises, including self-observation to bring about clarity and focus (Hayes, n.d.). Some interventions include yoga, walking meditation, or other physical activities to promote mindfulness through awareness of movement and breathing (Faizer, 2017).

One mindfulness intervention focuses simply around a set of eight questions (Passmore, 2019). In asking themselves these questions, students of the Henley Reflective Method have the opportunity to develop a higher level of mindfulness about business interactions of the past and opportunities of the future:

1. What have you observed?
2. How did you respond (think about your behavior, your emotions and your thoughts)?
3. What does that tell you about you as a person (your beliefs and assumptions)?
4. What does that tell you about you as a leader (your beliefs and assumptions about others)?
5. What strengths (advantages) do these offer?
6. What pitfalls (disadvantages) do these offer?
7. How might you respond differently next time?
8. What did you learn about yourself, the person and the situation? (pp. 167-168)

Regardless of the intervention used, it is advisable to structure it around a specific set of focal points. This will resonate well with Generation Z students who seek to align their performance with defined outcomes

(Castellano, 2016).

Mindfulness intervention does not need to take time away from in-seat instruction. Cotler and colleagues (2017) presented results of a 2015 mindfulness intervention delivered online at a small liberal arts college. The online intervention brought about improvement in undergraduates' emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional detection (Cotler et al., 2017). One newly published case study focusing on teaching mindfulness to journalism students reports that educators intending an intervention "must walk the methodological tightrope" (Pearson et al., 2018, p. 197).

Protection of Students' Rights. Students subjected to mindfulness intervention should always be fully informed about the concept, intervention structure, and desired outcomes. Students should always have the freedom to opt out (Haynes et al., 2013). The relevance to career preparation should be explained clearly. If the mindfulness intervention includes religious overtones brought about through chanting, singing, or study of ancient texts, participants may judge the effort to be for the purpose of proselytizing and be offensive and inappropriate in an educational context (Pearson et al., 2018).

Mindfulness intervention is undertaken to improve student awareness of self, the work environment, and the needs and feelings of others in the environment. It should bring a heightened sensitivity and, at the same time, a sense of poise. When carrying out a mindfulness intervention with students, the educator should be cautious to avoid opening up any deeper psychological issues of a participant in a classroom situation.

Assessing Impact. As with any effort to build student learning and career readiness, the results of mindfulness intervention should be assessed. There should be an unquestionable improvement in readiness for work, and that improvement should be directly attributable to the

intervention (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017). Development of an assessment plan should be undertaken side-by-side with the development of any mindfulness intervention. A benchmark for student performance should be established. Direct or indirect measures of student performance should be taken and compared to the benchmark. Results should lead to a closing-the-loop discussion about the impact of mindfulness intervention on student learning.

Mindfulness in PR Practice and Career Preparation

An introductory statement on a website presenting communications/media career opportunities to undergraduates offers a glamorous view of public relations and similar occupations:

> Working right in the center of the action can come with a major adrenaline rush . . . . If you long for the kind of job that puts you in the spotlight, one of these careers could be just what you're looking for. (Lee, 2020, para. 27)

It is true that public relations is a media-related field allowing unique creative expression, sometimes in exotic locales while utilizing the most modern technology. Society's desire to communicate is insatiable, and as a result, PR has expanded its reach and influence even in the most difficult economic times (Witmer & Swanson, 2020). But the public relations profession is undergoing unprecedented change, and working in it brings both highs and lows (Jiang & Shen, 2013).

The public relations workplace can be volatile and unpredictable as a consequence of technological advancement and new marketplace pressures (Arenstein, 2019). Entire agency structures have been torn down and rebuilt (Barrett, 2011). Increased international competitiveness brings questions about ethical and technical practice, and even uncertainty about the words used to define public relations contrast with other media specialties (Drabicky, 2019; Elliott, 2012; Jeong, 2011). Any public relations professional ill-equipped for the new realities can be put out of

work suddenly and without warning (Sweeney, 2010; Woloshin, 2009). The job of "PR executive" is ranked among the 10 most stressful in the workplace (Carufel, 2019). As a result of changing realities of public relations, its workplace roles, expectations and essential skills, PR professionals often struggle to remain resilient (Guo & Anderson, 2018; Jiang & Shen, 2013).

Undergraduates training for a public relations career may do so in one of more than 400 higher education programs (Gotlieb et al., 2017). But as within the professional workplace, there are unique volatilities and unresolved challenges within academe (Lombardi, 2013). Today's undergraduates often feel anxious and alienated (Soni, 2019). The U.S. higher education system has shouldered billions of dollars in funding reductions (Marcus, 2019). Reductions have been offset by program cuts, consolidations, and tuition increases (Mitchell et al., 2018). It may be difficult for PR students to look for immediate financial gain after graduation, as many PR jobs offer entry-level salaries as low as $30,000 a year (Lau, n.d.). These factors may lead to stress on a new PR practitioner.

Changing interests and perceptions of students can hinder educators' abilities to present essential workplace concepts (Crawford et al., 2013). The arrival of Generation Z, today's largest student cohort, has broadened this challenge (Tulgan, 2015). Gen Z students have been characterized as distracted communicators with "less-than-stellar organizational skills, productivity, follow-through, and timeliness" (Castellano, 2016, p. 18). Gen Z college graduates may not have mastered the soft skills employers most demand from entry-level workers (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016). Gen Z's emotional development and potential for successful transfer to the workplace may also be inhibited by well-meaning but overbearing "helicopter parents" (Hunt, 2008; Schiffrin et al., 2013).

These and other issues result in higher education faculty perceiving

insufficient time or resources to stay current in their discipline (Gose, 2010; Grasser, 2013; Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018). Faculty tell of a growing bureaucracy that demands expending up to a third of work time on duties unrelated to the classroom (Flaherty, 2014). PR educators in particular face a daunting set of curricular recommendations that even the largest and most resource-rich programs may struggle to meet (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018).

Higher education institutions routinely fail to prepare educators for these and other workplace challenges (Perlmutter, 2017). The resulting stresses ultimately lead to anxiety, diminished expectations, and depressed morale (Capaldi, 2011). Since public relations professionals face unprecedented cultural, economic, organizational, and technological change (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019), mindfulness intervention is relevant to the public relations workplace. Since undergraduate students face many stresses on the path to a degree and career, it would seem that mindfulness intervention is equally relevant to public relations education. But there exists no confirmation of awareness of mindfulness among public relations practitioners or students planning for public relations careers. There is a need for research documenting mindfulness intervention in public relations workplaces and classrooms.

Theoretical Framework for Mindful Action

The public relations profession and the higher education system that prepares undergraduates for careers in PR and media are both experiencing rapid transformational change (Rainie & Anderson, 2017). This change can be a source of great anxiety for the people involved. Therefore, the theoretical construct of social order (Eisenstadt, 1992) seems especially relevant to frame this inquiry of mindfulness in public relations.

A socially ordered workplace has a clear division of labor, established trust among workers, regulation of power for decision-

making, and institutional systems that legitimize activity (Eisenstadt, 1992). Communication in the socially ordered workplace would focus on communicating meaningful intent (Alexander, 1992). These attributes would allow the socially ordered workplace to be inherently mindful. A focused attention to reality "without the distractions and consultations the intellect contrives" (Richo, 2005, p. 94) would also be consistent with a socially ordered workplace.

In contrast, a workplace without systematic mindfulness intervention could inculcate distracted behavior. It would be a workplace with more focus on doing than being. In this mindless workplace, workers would be unable to see the correlation between otherwise disconnected phenomena. There would be excessive reliance on "categories and distinctions created in the past" that separate rather than unite (Langer, 1989, p. 11). Workers could easily make assumptions and take actions that are "not so smart" (McRaney, 2011, p. 7). A workplace where mindless behaviors are commonplace would be a workplace in disorder.

Research Questions

This exploratory study sought to fill an obvious gap in the scholarly literature in public relations by determining the extent to which PR professionals and undergraduates planning for public relations careers were aware of mindfulness as a concept. It was important to identify the extent to which mindfulness was perceived and applied as a coping strategy, and what similarities and differences existed between professionals and students. An important goal of the work was the development of recommendations for mindful intervention that could allow educators to better equip undergraduates for the realities of a public relations career. The following research questions were investigated:

> **RQ1:** How is the concept of mindfulness defined and its workplace relevance explained by public relations professionals and undergraduates preparing to enter the profession?

RQ2: Through completion of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, what similarities and differences will be noted among the perceptions of workplace interactions of public relations professionals and undergraduates preparing to enter the profession?

Method

This study was primarily qualitative in its focus and outcomes. The section below lays out the procedures undertaken for collecting and analyzing data on perceptions of mindfulness among public relations professionals and undergraduates.

Assessing Perceptions of Mindfulness

Many instruments have been created to assess mindfulness. The proliferation of different scales can make mindfulness a difficult construct to understand (Hyland, 2017). The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) is a simple psychometric assessment developed by social psychologist Kirk Warren Brown and clinical psychologist Richard M. Ryan (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS allows tracking of a subject's attention and response to situations in the environment (Brown et al., 2011). The MAAS has been characterized as "a valid, reliable and stable factor structure of mindfulness measure" (Phang et al., 2016, p. 313). It has been used in a number of different workplace contexts and is the most frequently cited instrument to measure self-report of mindfulness (Wong et al., 2018).

This exploratory study involved independent administration of the MAAS to professionals and to undergraduate PR students to identify similarities and differences in perceived reactions to common workplace scenarios. The MAAS was chosen due to its brevity and the need for only minimal semantic adjustment to be relevant in the context of public relations. The study was concerned with respondents' general perceptions and did not attempt to distinguish between trait and state mindfulness.

Populations for Study

The Public Relations Society of America is recognized as the preeminent professional association for public relations professionals in the U.S. Therefore, PRSA members were identified as the first of the two populations for study. A stratified random sampling was conducted of PRSA members from all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The sample was composed of members who identified in the association's membership directory as engaged in agency, corporate, nonprofit, or independent practitioner work. Retired practitioners and educators were excluded.

Students were recruited through their affiliations with student-run PR agencies, which offer concept and skill learning with a real-world focus and are recognized as a rigorous career preparation experience for undergraduates (Bush et al., 2017; Bush & Miller, 2011; Kim, 2015). Fewer than 5% of universities have the resources to successfully launch and manage an agency, and the vast majority of agencies are in the United States (Swanson, 2017). Given the likelihood that agency students were already receiving optimal preparation for the public relations workplace, undergraduates studying in student-run agencies in the U.S. were identified as the second population for study.

Data Collection

Data collection was accomplished via two 25-item questionnaires, one for professionals and the other for students. The 15-item MAAS instrument comprised the core of each questionnaire, as shown in the appendix. Some MAAS item wording was altered slightly to align with public relations workplace terminology. Data collection took place via an anonymous online survey administered over a four-month period in late 2018.

The questionnaire for professionals included 10 items inquiring

about workplace role and industry experience. The questionnaire for students included 10 items inquiring about length of student agency experience, time to degree completion, and career expectations. Questionnaires allowed open-ended answers, consistent with previous research (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017; Nilsson & Kazemi, 2016) but did not ask respondents to identify themselves or their employer/student agency.

Participants and Response Rates

Five hundred PRSA member professionals with email addresses listed in the association directory were individually sent survey invitations via email. A reminder message was sent within one week to all who had not responded. In a six-week period, 57 responses (11%) were received.

Because undergraduates could not be contacted independently to solicit participation, a convenience sample of students working in student-run agencies was conducted with the assistance of agency advisers. An explanation of the research effort and a link to the online questionnaire was provided to 45 advisers identified through their engagement in conferences or on social media. Twenty-six advisers agreed to disseminate the questionnaire link to include their students in the survey population. Not all advisers provided enrollment data as requested. The inquiry yielded 81 student responses over a six-week period.

Data Analysis

The inability to randomly identify and independently solicit survey participation from students prevented a statistical comparison between the data collected in the two surveys. Instead, responses were tallied in percentages, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Each of the 15 MAAS questions presented a statement about some common action or response of the public relations workplace, as shown in Table 1. Responses of "Almost Always," "Very Frequently," and "Somewhat Frequently" were collapsed during data analysis to result in a summary percentage score for "Frequently or Always Mindful." Responses of "Somewhat Infrequently," "Very

Infrequently," and "Almost Never" were collapsed during data analysis to result in a summary percentage score for "Infrequently or Almost Never Mindful." Comments offered by respondents were reviewed for topic and thematic consistency. Some examples are offered below.

Results

Nearly all PRSA member professionals were college degree holders (bachelor's degree, 57%; master's degree, 42%). One in three respondents reported attainment of APR or College of Fellows designation. More than 80% of professionals reported 11 or more years in PR or a closely related field. Work environments reported included nonprofit (24%), agency (15%), corporate (15%), education (14%), government or military (10%), medical (3%), independent practice (3%) and others (12%), including travel and financial services.

With regard to student participants, nearly all respondents (91%) reported more than three years of collegiate experience, and 83% planned degree completion within the year. When asked their first choice for a career, students chose public relations (46%), advertising (32%), marketing (7%), social media (2%), telecommunications (2%), or other (8%), including sales and event planning. When asked about their student agency involvement, 55% reported being new to the agency experience and 48% reported two or more academic terms of involvement. Respondents indicated a variety of work focus among student agencies, including public relations (31%), social media (26%), advertising (23%), marketing (11%), and other (9%), including videography and media relations.

Mindfulness Defined

Regarding RQ1 about how the concept of mindfulness is defined, a large majority of PR professionals (98%) and undergraduate students (93%) reported familiarity with mindfulness as a term. Respondents then indicated agreement with one or more of 11 possible definitions of

mindfulness, as shown in Table 1. When asked if mindfulness was relevant to public relations work, 50% of professionals answered in the affirmative. Among undergraduate respondents, 24% answered in the affirmative. When asked if their workplace was a mindful place, 36% of professionals responded yes, 38% responded no, and 25% were unsure. When asked if their student agency was a mindful place, 53% of undergraduates responded yes, 21% responded no, and 25% were unsure. Professionals provided 42 comments elaborating on their perception of mindfulness in the workplace. Undergraduates provided 39 comments elaborating on their perception of mindfulness in the student agency workplace. Selected comments are shown in Figure 2.

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

For RQ2, which asked about the similarities and differences between professionals' and undergraduates' views of workplace interactions, both professionals and students reported the highest perceptions of mindful awareness in the same four workplace action or response areas (see Table 2). Low perceptions of mindful awareness by both PR professionals and students were in alignment in three of the four lowest-ranked areas.

PR professionals reported the highest perceptions of mindful awareness in the action or response areas of physical movement (96%), attentiveness to belongings (94%), pace of activity (90%), and multitasking (83%). PR professionals reported the lowest perceptions of mindful awareness in the action or response areas of short-term memory recall (56%), inattentive listening (e.g., forgetting a person's name shortly after hearing it) (52%), physical tension or discomfort (38%), and emotional response (38%).

Undergraduates reported the highest perceptions of mindful awareness in the action or response areas of attentiveness to belongings (93%), physical movement (90%), multitasking (85%), and pace of

activity (84%). Undergraduates reported the lowest perceptions of mindful awareness in the action or response areas of inattentive listening (54%), mental preoccupation (44%), short-term memory recall (30%), and emotional response (25%).

Discussion

The results of this exploratory study document that PR professionals and undergraduates are familiar with mindfulness as a concept. Most respondents reported that mindfulness is related to presence in the moment and that it has links to productivity and meditation. Few professionals and students agreed with grossly inaccurate characterizations of mindfulness—that it is about fixing something wrong with you, suppressing bad feelings, or is some form of disguised Buddhism. But only half of the professionals and just 24% of undergraduates indicated a relevant connection between mindfulness and public relations work.

Respondents readily offered their perceptions of the mindfulness of their professional or academic workplace. Strong similarities of perceptions of workplace social order were noted throughout the responses. Among professionals, those reporting a perception that their workplace was mindful were in the minority. Overall, the comments from professionals affirm that PR work can be simultaneously autonomous but stressful, and outcomes can be ambiguous, yet deadline-driven. Professionals reported time management flexibility in an environment with long work hours.

Overall, undergraduates offered a stronger perception of a mindful (academic) workplace, with slightly more than half answering in the affirmative. This may be attributable to students' greater freedom generally because students are unlikely to spend an entire day sitting in an office. Still, students had their own set of workplace stressors that included distractions, interpersonal conflict, hurt feelings, and lack of time to do their best quality work. Student comments reflect strikingly similar

perceptions of workplace social order as those suggested by professionals.

No professionals reported mindfulness interventions presented in their workplace, and only one undergraduate reported a presentation of a mindfulness intervention: "Most recently our professor has taken a few moments to help do mindfulness exercises. I've really liked it because it has slowed down my morning and helped me focus on what my tasks are ahead."

The fact that PR professionals and students responded so similarly to the items on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale suggests that, when put in stressful situations, PR professionals and students perceive their environment and responses in much the same way. There is, in this context, a shared social order.

The strong similarities between reported perceptions of mindfulness by students and professionals suggest undergraduates could emotionally relate to concerns of the profession before they enter it. On the other hand, the lack of widespread perception among students that mindfulness is relevant in PR may suggest a lack of understanding of how mindfulness intervention can be a valuable coping strategy in a stressful occupation.

If undergraduates were made aware that some of their perceptions of specific mindfulness strengths and weaknesses align with those of working PR professionals, students might have a greater appreciation of what it is like to be a professional. Likewise, if undergraduates were educated to the benefits of mindfulness intervention as a coping strategy in PR, they might be more likely to see mindfulness as an essential skill to master before entering the workplace.

Educators are well aware that the public relations field is undergoing extensive transformational change, which can result in feelings of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and helplessness (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018; USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations,

2019). Helping public relations undergraduates through a systematic mindfulness intervention could help students cope with the immediate stresses of change within the academic world and, over the long term, prepare for stresses they will face in a rapidly changing field.

A systematic mindfulness intervention has the potential to do more than just help students navigate their way through problems. It can reinforce appropriate social order through demonstrating the importance of facing every professional encounter with poise, grace, and a strong sense of professional ethics. Even if ours was a perfect world free of all professional conflict, mindfulness would still be valuable to help people understand themselves and the others with whom they interact.

Limitations of the Study and Future Directions for Research

In the context of identifying survey populations, this exploratory study required some accommodations. In order to easily identify a population of PR professionals for the survey, the study targeted PRSA members. There was no way to efficiently identify and survey public relations professionals who were not among the association's membership.

There was no way to randomly survey undergraduates studying public relations and planning to enter the PR career field. Therefore, in order to identify a population of undergraduates for survey, the study targeted university student-run PR agencies. Agency advisers were solicited to distribute the undergraduate survey link to their students. Although advisers were willing to do this, the number of students that received the link is unknown because not all advisers complied with a request for their agency enrollment. The different methods of reaching PR professionals and students prevent any statistical comparison of results.

These structural limitations illustrate some of the opportunities that exist for future research to build upon the findings presented here. Future research could include use of the MAAS for a larger, random survey of professionals and students. This would allow quantitative comparison of

mindful attention awareness scores between two populations. In addition, the MAAS could be used to survey public relations educators to allow understanding of their perceptions of mindful awareness at work.

More descriptive qualitative research methods such as focus groups or in-depth interviews could be conducted to develop a detailed picture of how mindful and mindless actions impact the practice of public relations by professionals, educators, and undergraduates preparing for the workplace. Employers consistently argue that undergraduates enter the workplace lacking basic skills (Gaschen & Swanson, 2014), and a research inquiry could dig deeper into why those skills are perceived to be absent and whether mindlessness in the academic environment plays a role.

Structured mindfulness interventions could be undertaken in the public relations workplace to learn more about the stress professionals face and the coping methods they apply. Likewise, structured interventions could be planned and carried out in higher education programs. The documented results of these efforts could illustrate the efficacy of mindfulness in helping undergraduates cope with stress related to career preparation.

People's level of mindful awareness may vary (Nilsson & Kazemi, 2016), making it common for someone to slip from a state of mindful awareness to one of mindless busyness. The body of literature on mindfulness could be advanced by different types of inquiries into how workers can catch themselves when distraction occurs, and what they do to regain a more mindful composure. All of these ideas would offer valuable additional knowledge about public relations practice and undergraduate preparation for PR careers. There would also be new insights into the social order that manifests as people work together to prepare for and then engage in public relations work.

Conclusion

It is important to understand that workplace conflicts may be

symptoms of a bigger problem—an absence of mindfulness in the workplace. This absence of mindfulness is relevant because social order can be manifested in disorder as organizations and the people working within them struggle to be productive and creative. The construct of social order framed this inquiry because in public relations there is a great need for balancing productivity and creativity, especially as the technological demands of public relations work continue to expand. Professionals and educators in many other occupational fields recognize the importance of mindfulness as a contributor to a socially ordered workplace. It is hoped the findings of this exploratory study will prompt consideration and further inquiry in our field.

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Appendix A

PRSA Member Professional Questions From the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

Undergraduate student questions read, *When I am working in the student agency…*

Here is a collection of statements about experiences that can occur at work in public relations. Using the 1-6 scale as shown, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you perceive having these experiences: [1] Almost Always, [2] Very Frequently, [3] Somewhat Frequently, [4] Somewhat Infrequently, [5] Very Infrequently, [6] Almost Never. Please answer according to how you perceive your work experience, as opposed to what you think your experience ought to be like. Please treat each item separately from the others.

When I am working, I can be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until a later time.

When I am working, I lose, break or spill things because of being careless, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.

When I am working, I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.

When I am working, I tend to move quickly without paying attention to what I experience along the way.

When I am working, I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.

When I am working, I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.

When I am working, it seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.

When I am working, I rush through activities without really being attentive to them.

When I am working, I can get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.

When I am working, I perform jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.

When I am working, I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.

When I am working, I go to places and then wonder why I went there.

When I am working, I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
When I am working, I find myself doing things without paying attention.

When I am working, I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

Table 1

Mindfulness Defined and Workplace Relevance Explained by PR Professionals and PR Students

What do you think Mindfulness is all about?	Professionals	Students
It's about being aware or present in the moment.	38%	17%
It's about increasing productivity.	14%	19%
It's the same as meditation.	12%	11%
It's about slowing down productivity.	3%	0
It's about making you smarter.	3%	7%
It's about fixing something wrong with you.	3%	3%
It's the newest trendy thing.	3%	3%
It's about suppressing bad feelings.	1%	2%
It's Buddhism in disguise.	1%	2%
It accompanies yoga.	1%	6%
It's about escaping reality.	0	2%
It's relevant to public relations work.	50%	24%
It's very irrelevant to public relations work.	0	0

Note. Multiple responses allowed. Fifty-five professionals responded with a total of 88 responses. Sixty-seven students responded with total of 141 responses.

Figure 2

Mindful Workplace? – Comments by Professionals and Undergraduates Completing the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

Professionals	Students
Total number of comments = 42	Total number of comments = 39
Is your workplace a mindful place? Yes – 36% No – 38% Not sure – 25%	**Is your student agency a mindful place?** Yes – 53% No – 21% Not sure – 25%
Selected comments:	**Selected comments:**
We are dealing with communicating facts and details to larger audiences so it is important to be mindful of accuracy, tone and potential impact. The problem is some routine, repeated prep work can feel mindless.	At our student-run agency, students show mindfulness to their co-workers, customers, and advisors. It is about being aware of everyone's thoughts and feelings and using that awareness to make the right decisions.
Everybody is running around trying to put out today's fires. There isn't a lot of time for mindfulness or planning or even focusing on a project.	We're taught to be mindful of how our work impacts our clients, and we have to think about our audience's POV before we do anything.
If you feel bad you bury it to be a good employee.	Recently, people are preoccupied with other school work/ priorities that it feels like often times no ones really all "there" or exhibiting their best thinking/ work.
It takes conscious effort, but when the days are long and it's dark when you arrive and when you leave, it's really important to remember WHY we show up every day.	Sometimes the workload is so intense I have to go on autopilot grind mode and get things done as fast as I can. I feel like I don't get the time to make the best work possible.

Professionals	Students
Total number of comments = 42	Total number of comments = 39
Each person has their own way to release stress. Some go for a way, some leave early to take an exercise class, some come in a bit later to exercise in the morning. Our agency understands the need to balance hard work and those of the individual. We also believe in having fun at work and implement different ways to do that as well.	The agency does encourage you to think critically and reflect, but it's not mindfulness because there isn't enough time and energy to devote to think about your thinking.
I have a lot of autonomy at work and I consider myself mindful. Whether the workplace is 'mindful,' I am unsure.	

Note. Selected comments are presented here as they were written.

Table 2

Perceptions of Mindful Attention Awareness by PR Professionals and PR Undergraduates Completing the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

Workplace Action or Response	Professionals (*n* = 57)			Students (*n* = 81)		Workplace Action or Response
	Frequently or Always Mindful	Infrequently or Almost Never Mindful		Frequently or Always Mindful	Infrequently or Almost Never Mindful	
Physical movement	**96%**	3%		**93%**	6%	**Attentiveness to belongings**
Attentiveness to belongings	**94%**	5%		**90%**	9%	**Physical movement**
Pace of activity	**90%**	9%		**85%**	14%	**Multitasking**
Multitasking	**83%**	16%		**84%**	15%	**Pace of activity**
"In the now"	81%	18%		83%	16%	Eating
Task awareness	81%	18%		81%	18%	Focus
"Running on automatic"	81%	18%		78%	21%	"In the now"
Eating	80%	20%		78%	21%	Task awareness
Mental preoccupation	77%	22%		78%	21%	Physical tension or discomfort
Focus	74%	25%		75%	24%	The personal experience
The personal experience	67%	32%		75%	24%	"Running on automatic"
Emotional response	61%	**38%**		74%	**25%**	**Emotional response**
Physical tension or discomfort	61%	**38%**		69%	**30%**	**Short-term memory recall**
Inattentive listening	47%	**52%**		55%	**44%**	**Mental preoccupation**
Short-term memory recall	43%	**56%**		45%	**54%**	**Inattentive listening**

A Simulation as a Pedagogical Tool for Teaching Professional Competencies in Public Relations Education

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates there are common competencies that are required by the public relations industry, such as business acumen, communication skills, and critical thinking. This study examined how the use of a simulation exercise could assist students in developing these competencies. The simulation exercise was blended with other pedagogical tools to assist in teaching crisis communications to a group of post-graduate public relations students in Ireland. A mixed methods methodology was used. Situational judgment tests were exclusively designed for this research, in consultation with a team of public relations professionals. These tests were used for the quantitative analysis while a focus group and reflection were used for the qualitative analysis. The exercise was found to have a positive effect on the development of competencies in students. The findings are useful for establishing competency standards for entry-level preparation and for identifying pedagogical approaches that may assist students in preparing for careers in the industry.

Keywords: public relations, pedagogy, competencies, situational judgment tests, experiential learning, blended learning

Higher education institutions are grappling with the challenges of meeting the modern learning needs of students and the ever-evolving demands of industry. Research indicates there are competencies needed within the public relations industry such as critical thinking and communication skills (Barnes & Tallent, 2015; Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018; Flynn, 2014; Madigan, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore if specific pedagogical techniques, including a simulation exercise, could assist students in developing these competencies. To achieve this aim, a research study was designed based on Picciano's (2009) multimodal model of blended learning and Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle. A simulation exercise was blended with other face-to-face and online pedagogical tools and used to assist in teaching students to manage media communications in a crisis situation.

The study was conducted with post-graduate public relations students, using a concurrent mixed methods methodology. To assess the efficacy on the development of the competencies in students, situational judgment tests were designed specifically for this study, in consultation with a team of public relations professionals. A focus group and a reflection formed the qualitative analysis. The findings of the research are of benefit to the public relations industry in that they could help with the testing of competencies required at entry-level into the profession and in the identification of pedagogical approaches that have the potential to assist public relations students in preparing for careers in the industry.

Competencies Required by the Public Relations Industry

The higher education sector has been in a period of significant transition over the last two decades as a result of the evolution of technology, widespread participation in education, and changing competency demands from the industry regarding entry-level preparation (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2018; Strategy Group, 2011). Flynn (2014) postulated that 21st century public relations practitioners are required to

have a "different skill set and competencies [than] their counterparts" who practiced before them (p. 363). In its 2018 report on the Workforce of the Future, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) stated: "We are living through a fundamental transformation in the way we work. Automation and 'thinking machines' are replacing human tasks and jobs and changing the skills that organisations are looking for in their people" (p. 3). In a survey of academic and industry leaders, the IBM Institute for Business Value found that 71% of industry recruiters had difficulty finding applicants with sufficient practical experience (King, 2015). The IBM study also revealed that the skills leaders required in the industry were the very skills graduates lacked: problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, business-context communication and flexibility, agility, and adaptability. In its most recent report on the needs within the PR industry, the Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) echoed those desires for problem solving—"the most desired abilities are creative thinking, problem solving, and critical thinking" (p. 15). Alongside problem solving, other communication skills are requirements for senior public relations professionals, whose role is ultimately to communicate on behalf of an organization in a written or oral manner.

The essential skill of critical thinking is defined by the Foundation for Critical Thinking (n.d.) as:

> That mode of thinking—about any subject, content, or problem—in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. . . . Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. . . . It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities. (para. 2)

A study by Barnes and Tallent (2015) focused specifically on teaching critical thinking skills to Millennials (people born between 1981 and 2000) in public relations classes. They referred to an ability to think critically as

vital in public relations professionals and recommended that it should be taught in communication courses.

Communication skills are clearly foundational in public relations, as can be seen in this definition of the field: "the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest" (Theaker, 2016, p. 5). These "planned programs of action" can be interpreted as strategies that assist an organization in communicating its messages with its publics, including through the media. Thus, in addition to general oral and written communication skills, an ability to communicate specifically with the media is a vital skill required by all public relations professionals.

In addition to skills such as writing, content creation, and problem solving, the Commission on Public Relations Education's (2018) latest report lists items entry-level PR practitioners need to know, including business acumen. The CPRE report defines the term business acumen as "understanding how business works, to provide the contextual significance of public relations" (p. 28). Following the Oxford Dictionary of English's (n.d.) definition of acumen, competency in business acumen would indicate an ability to make good judgments and quick decisions that are appropriate in business. Business acumen has also been explained as a "good appreciation of business, business strategy, and business intelligence" (Gregory, 2008, p. 220). Flynn (2014) proffers that business acumen is a competency that has been widely reported in the literature and by industry professionals as important to public relations practice. In their article published on the Institute of Public Relations' (IPR) website titled "Public Relations and Business Acumen: Closing the Gap," Ragas and Culp (2014) stated, "As the public relations industry evolves, the need for greater business acumen among professionals working in all levels of the field . . . has never been more important" (para. 1). They added that

"to be a strategic partner to clients requires an intimate understanding of business, and how your counsel can advance organization goals and objectives" (Ragas & Culp, 2014, para. 1).

Blended Learning and Learning Theory

While the industry is demanding graduates with more specific skills, higher education institutions are grappling with larger class sizes and a more diverse student population comprising a range of ages, genders, nationalities, and academic abilities (Strategy Group, 2011). To address the increased diversity of the student population, higher education is required to be more creative in its curricula design and in its teaching methods. As the Irish Strategy Group led by Dr. Colin Hunt stated, "we need new structures that better reflect the diverse learning requirements of our students" (p. 4). At an institutional level, this has resulted in a move away from the traditional didactic approach of teaching toward a more student-centered approach, involving a more interactive style of learning (Kember, 2009). This has translated to curriculum design that encourages active learning and employs pedagogical techniques that can assist in the development of what the Strategy Group refers to as the "high-order knowledge-based skills" (p. 4).

Blended learning is an educational approach that combines traditional and contemporary teaching and learning methods. Cost effectiveness, access, flexibility, and an ability to address diverse student needs are cited among its benefits (Bonk & Graham, 2006). "Blended learning" is a term that has evolved in tandem with the evolution of technology over the last 20 years and although it has many definitions, it is most commonly used to describe a program or module where face-to-face and online teaching methods are combined (Partridge et al., 2011).

There are many models of blended learning available, one of which is the multimodal model of blended learning (Picciano, 2009). This model offers clear direction on basic pedagogical objectives and

approaches that can be employed to assist the instructor in achieving the required outcomes. This model recognizes the role of blended learning in addressing the varying learning needs in a group of learners. Picciano (2009) states that this model caters to the diverse needs of a modern classroom that may include different personalities, generations, and learning styles. In the multimodal model, six basic pedagogical objectives are recommended when designing a blended learning program, including content, social and emotional factors, dialectic/questioning, synthesis/ evaluation (assignments/assessment), collaboration/student-generated content, and reflection. Picciano recommends teaching approaches to assist the learners and the teachers in meeting these objectives, including content management systems (CMS), multi-user virtual environments (MUVE), discussion boards, presentations, assessments, e-portfolios, wikis, blogs, and journals.

Blended learning is a style that is rooted in constructivist teaching and learning theory. According to Schunk (2012), "Constructivism requires that we structure teaching and learning experiences to challenge students' thinking so that they will be able to construct new knowledge" (p. 274). Within the constructivist learning philosophy, several teaching and learning strategies have been proposed, with one of the most influential contemporary models being Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle. The experiential learning cycle identifies four modes of learning the learner needs to transition through to develop a deep understanding of a topic. The modes are defined as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience involves the dissemination of information, for example, through a lecture or another means of content delivery. Abstract conceptualization refers to the development of the learner's own thoughts. Reflective observation allows the learner to learn through reflecting on the information acquired, and during the active experimentation phase, the

learner puts the learning into practice.

Public Relations Education

The Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) made recommendations for designing and structuring higher education undergraduate public relations programs. It stated PR educational curricula should cover six essential topics, including introduction to or principles of public relations, research methods, writing, campaigns and case studies, supervised work experience or internships, and ethics. A course that has work experience incorporated into its curriculum would be ideally placed to provide students with the best opportunity to learn in the areas of campaigns and case studies, work experience/internships, and ethics, as they are topics that are more practical in nature. Many public relations courses offer a combination of theoretical content and work experience, presumably to prepare the students for industry by equipping them with both theoretical and practical knowledge. The question is then, what are the most appropriate pedagogical methods to use to equip students with this practical knowledge?

Present research supports the use of creative teaching methods in the classroom to teach practical skills, such as simulations and what Barnes and Tallent (2015) referred to as "constructivist thinking tools" (p. 437). Their study offered examples of exercises, such as group work, discussions, reflective writing, and mind-maps in which students are encouraged to visualize information, group related items together, and identify problems and solutions as a result.

The word "simulation" can be used to define the "imitation of a situation or process" or "the production of a computer model of something, especially for the purpose of study" (Oxford Dictionary of English, n.d.). Evidence of the use of simulations in PR pedagogy as an "imitation of a situation or process" (Oxford Dictionary of English, n.d.) is more common. In an Australia-based study, Sutherland and Ward (2018)

conducted research on the efficacy of using an immersive simulation as a pedagogical tool to provide students with practical experience of a media conference. In the study, they combined simulation tools such as role-play and immersive technology in which scenes from PR scenarios were projected onto the walls. They found that students enjoyed the experience, and it enhanced their learning and analytical skills. The students recommended the use of the pedagogical tools in the future. Similarly, Veil (2010) simulated a press conference held in response to a crisis. Role-based scenario simulations were the main simulation tool used in the study, which was conducted with communication students. Students reported finding the exercise beneficial to their learning, although some did report reservations about the spontaneous nature of the activity. Another study in the U.S. found that crisis simulation can significantly increase students' crisis management competencies. The author recommends simulation-based training could be used in other areas of public relations and should become part of the "pedagogical toolbox" (Wang, 2017, p. 107).

When assessing the specific competencies required by the PR industry, more interactive tools than the common written assignments might be required. For example, Bartam (2004) links competencies to performance and identifies workplace assessments and simulations as appropriate measurement tools. An example of an assessment format that has been used in the medical profession to measure non-academic attributes in medical graduates is the situational judgment test (SJT) (Patterson et al., 2016). Specific competencies the SJT can test include reasoning, problem solving, and decision making. An SJT comprises a hypothetical scenario (presented in written or video format) that medical graduates are likely to encounter in the workplace. Candidates are asked to identify the appropriateness or effectiveness of various response options from a predefined list. Patterson et al. (2016) recommend that response

instructions for SJTs should fall into one or two categories: knowledge-based (what is the best option?/what should you do?) and behavior (what would you be most likely to do?). To ensure validity, the response options and scoring mechanism should be agreed upon in advance by industry experts.

This study set out to explore the use of a simulation as a pedagogical tool and its ability to assist students of public relations in developing competencies required by the public relations industry. A constructivist pedagogical approach that used a specifically designed blended learning model, comprising a practical simulation at its core, was designed for this research and to assist students in developing the competencies identified. A situational judgment test was specifically designed for this study and used to assess the development of these competencies in students alongside a focus group and a reflective exercise.

Method

This study sought to examine if the use of a simulation as a pedagogical tool could assist students of public relations in developing competencies required by the public relations industry. The research involved the use of a concurrent mixed methods methodology involving qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative analysis was conducted through a situational judgment test (SJT) specifically designed to measure the competencies identified as required by the PR industry. The SJTs were designed to ultimately assess students for the competencies of critical thinking and media communication skills, and the questions were therefore centered around the development and communication of effective arguments in response to difficult questions. Qualitative methods included a focus group and a reflective exercise, which were used to analyze the students' learning experiences and the development of the competencies of critical thinking, business acumen, and communication skills. The design of the research strategy was rooted in constructivist

teaching and learning philosophy through the use of Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle and Picciano's (2009) multimodal model of blended learning.

Participants

The research was conducted over a two-month period as part of the standard curriculum delivery in a PR module. Sixteen full-time post-graduate students of public relations in Ireland volunteered to participate in the study. The group was approximately split 50% between male and female students, and all participants were within the 21-30 age bracket with limited to no relevant work experience. The participants were students of the researcher's in the final semester of a one-year post-graduate module in public relations. The course is registered as a Level 9 course on the National Framework of Qualifications Grid as set by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2020). As the lecturer for these students was also the conductor of the research, there may have been a potential for bias. However, to conduct the simulation, a facilitator was required who had the specific knowledge of and skills in the practice of public relations, and it was deemed that this requirement would outweigh any potential for bias. It was submitted to the Ethics Committee at Griffith College Dublin, and all participants indicated their understanding and agreement to participate by signing a consent form. Participants were offered the opportunity to revoke their consent at any stage during the process. All information provided by the participants was treated in the strictest of confidence. Data collected from the questionnaires was anonymized, and the data were not identifiable during the research process or in the findings presented.

Research Design

The study was developed around the teaching of crisis management. A blended learning model was designed to ensure the simulation could be combined into the course in a manner that enabled

the pedagogical objectives and learning outcomes of the public relations curriculum to be achieved. The program was designed using the pedagogical objectives and approaches outlined in the multimodal model of blended learning. These were then mapped against Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle to direct the learning stages and approaches and ensure the model was rooted in learning theory. This process is illustrated and explained in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and the Multimodal Model of Blended Learning
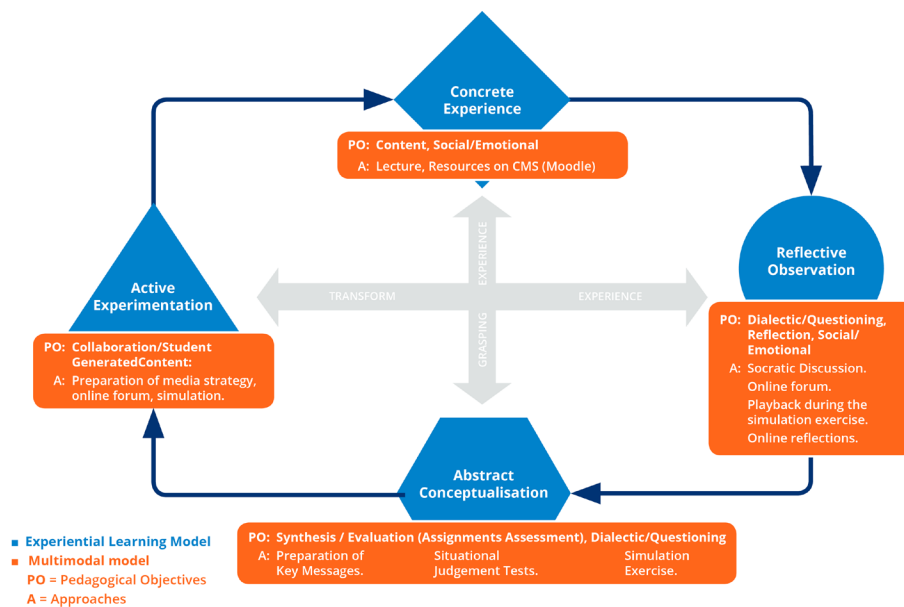
In Picciano's (2009) multimodal model of blended learning, six basic pedagogical objectives are recommended when designing a blended learning program, including content, social and emotional, dialectic/ questioning, synthesis/evaluation (assignments/assessment), collaboration/ student-generated content and reflection. Picciano proposes teaching

approaches to assist the learners and the teachers in meeting these objectives, including CMS, MUVE, discussion boards, presentations, assessments, e-portfolios, wikis, blogs, and journals.

The process outlined above explains how this model was mapped against the four modes of learning identified in Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle to produce a program of face-to-face and online pedagogical activity that could meet the learning objectives. The process can be broken down by examining each mode of the experiential learning cycle individually. For example, in this instance, the theory and relevant information delivered by the lecturer on the management of media relations in the event of a crisis provided the "concrete experience." Figure 1 demonstrates the lecture and content that was made available on Moodle during these exercises also fulfilled two of the multimodal model's pedagogical objectives of "content" and "social and emotional factors." The multimodal model views "content" as "the primary driver of instruction" and states that it can be delivered and presented via numerous means (Picciano, 2009, p. 14). In this program, the content was delivered by using a lecture and PowerPoint slides and by making case studies and articles available on the course management software system. The delivery of the content through an in-class lecture also fulfills the "social and emotional" pedagogical objective of the multimodal model. The model stipulates that "social and emotional development is an important part of anyone's education" and that even students on advanced graduate courses require "someone with whom to speak, whether for understanding a complex concept or providing advice" (Picciano, 2009, p. 14). Therefore, the diagram demonstrates that the delivery of the content using these face-to-face and online approaches meets the "content" and "social and emotional" pedagogical objectives of the multimodal model and falls under the "concrete experience" learning mode of Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Figure 1 can continue to be followed in the same manner

to examine each of the modes of experiential learning and the associated pedagogical objectives, as well as the learning approaches used to achieve them.

To explain the timeline of the study, at the outset, students were presented with content on crisis management through a PowerPoint lecture. The lecture provided students with information about crisis management and steps as to how to communicate with the media on behalf of an organization in a time of crisis. Students were presented with a case study involving a data breach by an internationally renowned technology company. They watched a video relating to this crisis, followed by a Socratic discussion led by the lecturer. As identified in a study by Parkinson and Ekachai (2002), the leader of the Socratic discussion is required to have a knowledge of the subject, in addition to an understanding of how to conduct a Socratic discussion. The aim of this discussion was to assist the students in developing an understanding of the principles and concepts involved in representing an organization in the media in response to a crisis. Following the completion of the Socratic discussion, students were directed to work in groups to develop their media strategies to respond to the crisis. Each group then worked together outside of the classroom and online in a collaborative forum where the groups posted their strategies to enable feedback from their peers and from the lecturer.

An immersive simulation exercise then took place in which students assumed the role of the spokesperson for the organization in crisis in an interview with a professional news journalist. A camera was set up and operated by a professional camera technician. Microphones and lighting were connected to simulate a real-life television news interview situation. The students were split into two groups of eight. Each individual group member was then immersed in the experience as they were interviewed individually by the journalist and asked to put their

learning into practice by responding to the crisis in a simulated live media interview. The journalist asked challenging questions, such as "When did you learn about this issue?," "Why did it take so long to communicate with your customers?," "How do you plan to prevent this from happening again?" Students were required to think quickly and revert to their key messages and their preparation to respond. Students had been given 24 hours' notice to prepare their key message to simulate a real-life situation in which a spokesperson would often be given very short notice before a media interview. Each student was recorded on camera and observed and assessed as the interview took place. On completion of all eight interviews, a selection of excerpts from videos were played back for discussion and formative feedback. The process was repeated with the second group. Students were assessed on their performance and the mark/ grade represented a percentage of their overall grade for the module.

Measurement

The methods used in this research were evaluated using bespoke scenario-based multiple-choice questionnaires (situational judgment tests, known as SJTs), a focus group, and a reflective exercise. At the commencement of the study, prior to the first lecture and again on completion of the study, students were directed online to complete the SJT. An SJT template was designed for the purpose of this research by a team of senior PR professionals who were assembled to consult on the scenarios, questions and answers, and scoring method for each test (see Appendix A). Scenarios were drafted and questions were formulated around these scenarios. Critical thinking and media communications skills were the core competencies that were measured in the SJTs. The questions were designed to demonstrate an ability to make effective arguments to support the key messages that the students were attempting to communicate. In line with best practice as identified in the literature review on SJTs, the questions were set into the two categories of

knowledge (what is the best option?/what should you do?) and behavior (what would you be most likely to do?). Answers were proposed for each question, and the expert team reached a consensus on the most appropriate answers for each question. A scoring key was then developed for each test in order to group student responses into the categories of excellent, good, satisfactory, and poor. Students' answers were analyzed and counted on completion of the first test, and responses were compared to those of the second test on completion of the entire study to provide a quantitative analysis on the development of each of the predefined competencies. The process of designing the SJT in consultation with industry experts ensured the validity of these tests in their use for the first time as tests to measure competencies in PR students. Examples of the tests and scoring key are available in Appendix A.

Following completion of the simulation and the second SJT, students were afforded the opportunity to reflect on their performance and the learning experience in an online exercise. All participants watched their performance through a secure video link on their own time and in privacy. Students then completed an online reflection, the objective of which was to inform the research as to the development of the competencies of critical thinking, business acumen, and communication skills. The reflection also served as a learning exercise for the students to encourage a deeper learning experience. The reflection consisted of a question asking the students to provide their opinions, in no more than 500 words, on the simulation exercise.

Finally, on completion of the study, students participated in a focus group to discuss their perceptions of the learning experience and the impact they felt it had on the development of the competencies identified (see Appendix B). According to Daymon and Halloway (2011), the purpose of a focus group is "to concentrate on one or two clear issues or objects and discuss them in depth" (p. 241). In addition to offering insight

as to students' perceptions, the focus group was a useful exercise in itself for students in using and developing critical thinking skills. Eight students participated in the focus group, which was facilitated, recorded, and transcribed by the lecturer.

Results

The overall objective of this study was to ascertain if the use of a simulation could assist students in developing the competencies required by the public relations industry. Overall, the results show that the questions in the situational judgment test that were most focused on critical thinking and media communication skills showed slight improvements. The development of business acumen was not evidenced in the SJTs specifically; however, the development of this competency was inferred from the results of the qualitative analysis.

In an effort to quantify any change in student performance from SJT I to SJT II, it was necessary to develop a standardization that was not sensitive to the different number of students in each. Direct comparison is not possible with two different student totals and the small data sets. Thus, each student who received a "poor" score was given one point, two points were given for each "satisfactory," three for "good," and four for excellent. The point total was then divided by the total number of students (16 for SJT I; 13 for SJT II) to determine the dimension's mean score. Since the mean scores are a measure of the overall performance on the SJT and are not sensitive to different response totals, they allow for direct comparison.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of the means between SJT I and SJT II for each of the six dimensions, while Table 1 presents the numerical scores for each measure of student performance. The number of students receiving that score for each of the six dimensions is reported. Using the scale described in the previous paragraph, a point total for the student performance for that SJT is attained and a mean score is calculated. The final column gives the difference in the mean scores for SJT I and SJT II.

The mean score differences for five of the six dimensions were positive, indicating improved student performance. The greatest increase in student performance was for Dimension 2: Key Messages. Only one dimension, Aftermath, showed a negative difference, demonstrating lower mean scores on the second SJT.

Figure 2

Overall Means for SJT 1 and SJT 2
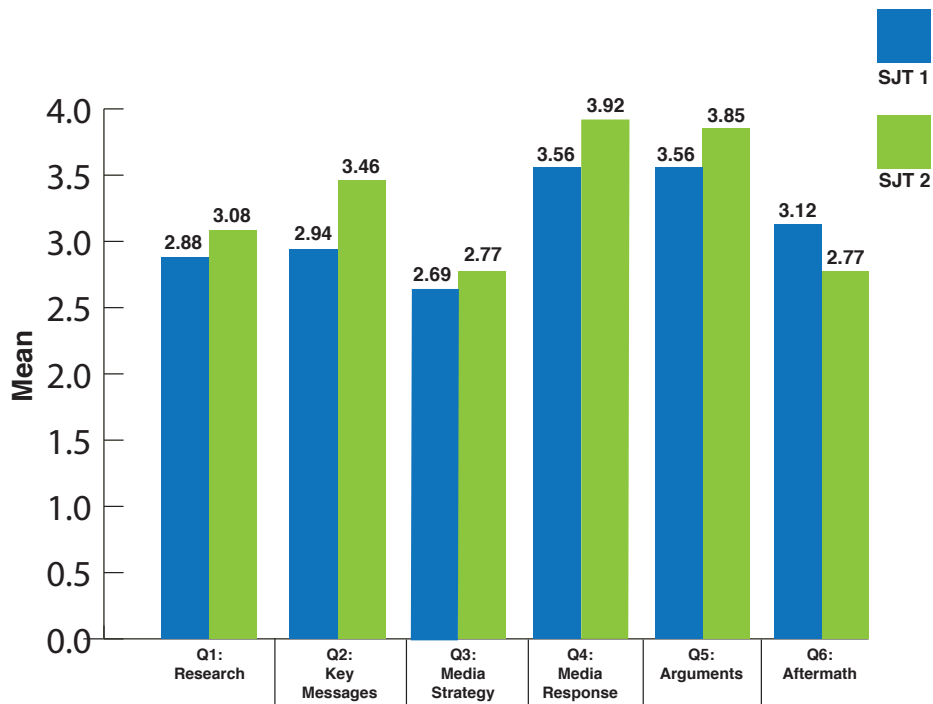
The first question asked in the SJTs was centered around research. The question asked participants to explain how they would approach the fact-gathering exercise involved in crisis communication management. There was an improvement of one participant achieving an excellent result in this question between the first and second questionnaires. The second question was focused on the development of key messages and asked students to identify the three most important key messages. In this

question, there was an improvement of six people in those achieving an excellent result in the second questionnaire. Question three in each SJT asked participants to explain how they would approach the media. This question was the most difficult for participants with limited experience in media communication, and the results are perhaps indicative of this with five fewer students achieving an excellent result. However, five more students received a good result in SJT II in this question. Questions four and five were centered around the media response and the arguments to make within the media. In both these questions, there were slight improvements of three and two participants, respectively, in

Table 1
Situational Judgment Tests 1 and 2 Mean Comparisons and Standardized Mean Scores

SJT Dimension	SJT I: Veganism						SJT II: Defective Cell Phone Batteries					Mean Difference
	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mean (point Total)		Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mean (point Total)	
1-Research	2 (2)	2 (4)	8 (24)	4 (16)	2.88 (46)		1 (1)	2 (4)	5 (15)	5 (20)	3.08 (40)	+.20
2-Key Messages		2 (4)	13 (39)	1 (4)	2.94 (47)			1 (2)	5 (15)	7 (28)	3.46 (45)	+.52
3-Media Strategy	6 (6)		3 (9)	7 (28)	2.69 (43)		2 (2)	1 (2)	8 (24)	2 (8)	2.77 (36)	+.08
4-Media Response			7 (21)	9 (36)	3.56 (57)				1 (3)	12 (48)	3.92 (51)	+.36
5-Arguments			7 (21)	9 (36)	3.56 (57)				2 (6)	11 (44)	3.85 (50)	+.29
6- Aftermath	4 (4)	1 (2)		11 (44)	3.12 (50)		2 (2)	5 (10)		6 (24)	2.77 (36)	-.35

those achieving an excellent result. Finally, in question six, participants were asked to explain how they would manage communications in the aftermath of the crisis. The majority of participants in both SJTs achieved a satisfactory to excellent result with two fewer participants in the poor category in SJT II.

Analysis

Critical Thinking

Two questions within the SJTs were specifically focused on critical thinking (questions 4 and 5). These questions centered around the response to and the making of effective arguments in the media. In the first of these questions, three more participants in question 4 and two more participants in question 5 achieved an "excellent" result in the second test.

The next of these questions related to the construction of arguments. In this question, two more students received an "excellent" result in SJT II compared to the same style of questions in SJT I. The content of these questions is detailed in Appendix A.

The increase in the number of students achieving good and excellent scores in the second test for both these questions could indicate that the exercise had a positive impact on the participants' ability to think critically. In addition, in the qualitative analysis through the reflection and the focus group, students pointed to critical thinking as one of the learning achievements from the exercises. For example, when asked what they learned from the experience, one student said, "being creative in thought—creative mentally," while another mentioned "on-the-spot critical thinking." The observations of the students indicate the immersive nature of the simulation exercise impacted their critical thinking skills. For example, a student cited a key learning takeaway from the activity was "applying your skills in the outside world."

Business Acumen

In this study, business acumen was largely demonstrated through

the students' conveyed understanding of the challenges that businesses face in the event of a crisis and in communicating with the public through the media as a result. One student said, "It was an eye-opener to find solutions to problems other companies are facing. It was practical." Another stated, "If I were working in a massive organization that had this crisis and I'm approached by the media, even without them informing me in time, I would have something to say. It was of immense benefit for me." These comments indicate students developed a better understanding of how a situation like this might affect a business and how it could protect its reputation in the media as a result.

Communications Skills

The effect of the exercise on media communication skills can be seen in the responses to this question on key message development. The results for this question in SJT II indicated an increase of six people in those selecting all three most appropriate key messages (or an "excellent" result). The content of this question is detailed in Appendix A. Students also referenced the importance of key messages several times within their feedback during the focus group and reflections. For example, one student said, "I learned how important it is to have key messages that you can refer to when answering tricky questions," while another said: "I was pleased with how I communicated my message. I thought that I reverted back to the key messages when in a difficult corner."

In addition to media communication skills, the qualitative analysis offered insight into the impact of the exercise on students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Verbal communications were assessed through the students' ability to make effective arguments during the simulation and to effectively express their key messages they had prepared in advance. Non-verbal communication consisted of tone of voice, hand gestures, body language, and facial expressions. The majority of students referenced communication skills as a key takeaway and focused heavily

on this in their reflections and the focus group. Students discussed the importance of content, such as communicating their top-line and three key messages, and they addressed style, such as speaking clearly and slowly in concise sentences. One student commented, "I sometimes talked more than needed, so going forward I could stop sooner when I was happy with my answer."

The analysis also reveals that there was a tendency for students to be self-critical of their non-verbal communication skills, more so than their verbal communication skills. This is evidenced in the following comments: "I think that at times my facial expressions during the questioning were a little bit distracting, so I would try and keep a less expressive face next time" and "I assumed my body language was OK but I realized there were some mistakes after I watched the video."

Discussion

The higher education sector worldwide is endeavoring to meet the learning requirements of a technologically savvy and increasingly diverse student demographic. Simultaneously, the sector is challenged with ensuring higher education graduates can bring modern relevant competencies required by industry with them into entry-level positions upon graduation. There is evidence to suggest the industry is actively seeking competencies in new entrants to the PR profession that can also be difficult to teach such as business acumen, communication skills, and critical thinking. The objective of this research was to ascertain if a simulation could assist students in developing these competencies that are required by the public relations industry.

To investigate this, a blended learning model was designed that was based on the multimodal model of blended learning and mapped against Kolb's (2015) experiential learning cycle. In this model, a simulation exercise was blended with other face-to-face and online pedagogical tools to teach students how to manage media communication

in the event of a crisis. To analyze the efficacy of this model in assisting in developing these competencies, a concurrent mixed methodology was employed using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative methods included a reflection and a focus group. The quantitative method implemented in the research was an SJT. To ensure its validity for use in this research, the test was designed exclusively in consultation with a team of public relations professionals to test for competencies required at the entry level in the public relations profession.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited by the size of the sample group and the duration of the study. A more detailed study using a larger group, including a control group over a longer period of time would offer further insight into the efficacy of the methods used in this study on the development of competencies required in the PR industry. The results of the exercises, however, indicated the activity had a positive impact on the development of key competencies in students. The qualitative analysis, which included the student reflections and focus groups, offered an indication the students themselves felt the exercises had an impact on their learning experience and assisted them in developing their business acumen, critical thinking, and communication skills.

Although the students indicated they sensed an impact, the SJTs did not show an impact on the development of business acumen among participants. Future investigation would be required to ascertain the most appropriate measurement tool to analyze the development of this competency. The tests did demonstrate slight improvements in the competencies of critical thinking and media communication skills. These tests could be developed further for use as an assessment tool within a public relations curriculum to teach students to consider how they would respond to difficult questions in media interviews or in crisis situations. The tests require students to think of solutions or arguments

to difficult scenarios quickly and, combined with a simulation exercise, this pedagogical approach may be particularly useful in teaching students how to manage common practical problems faced by public relations practitioners. It is worth noting that the comments from participants in the reflections indicated the students tended to be self-critical of their body language; future studies should encourage educators to guide students in order for them to recognize the importance of nonverbal communication, but help them not to focus on it to the exclusion of other elements of their message delivery.

In addition to the pedagogical benefits, the SJTs may also contribute positively to the PR industry in that they could be used by employers to test interviewees for competencies in specific areas. A standardized SJT could contribute positively to the PR industry and increase employability of students. They could be designed to complement CPRE's list of competencies as tests for employers when interviewing new entrants to the industry and as class assignments for more practical subjects such as crisis communications and medical skills.

Another example of simulation as "the production of a computer model of something" can be seen in the emerging technologies of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), which could be the topic of future research. VR allows users, through the use of a headset, to immerse themselves completely in an alternative reality. AR allows the user to bring elements of the artificial world into the real world. Both technologies are being used in education in the STEM disciplines, but there is little evidence cataloging their use in the teaching of public relations. Research in this area of PR education could offer insight as to whether simulations of this nature could be beneficial in teaching media communication skills and critical thinking by enabling learners to immerse themselves in computer- or video-generated common scenarios, such as press conferences or media events.

The results of this research benefit the public relations industry and public relations education. In relation to experiential and blended learning, this research offers an insight as to how simulations and situational judgment tests can be used as a form of active experimentation and assessment. In terms of public relations education, the findings offer insight to educators as to the most appropriate pedagogical and assessment approaches that can be implemented to assist students in developing competencies required by the public relations industry and thus assist in increasing students' employability. Further research at an industry level would help define the competencies and qualifications required, and additional research at an educational level could help set standards in best practice in public relations pedagogy.

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Appendix A

Situational Judgement[1] Tests

The National Vegan Association has launched a national campaign to raise awareness on animal rights and promote veganism. The campaign includes high-visibility outdoor advertising activity that uses a range of emotive posters to encourage people to cease meat and dairy consumption and to convert to veganism.

The organisation's spokesperson has been in the media (radio, TV, print and online) discussing the new ad campaign and the rationale behind it. The organisation's central argument is that the widespread consumption of animal products is having a catastrophic effect on the environment. The source of the Vegan group's funding is unclear.

You are the public relations officer/consultant for the National Farmers' Association, who view this as a potential crisis situation. The Farmers' Association is concerned that the Vegan Association is communicating

[1]Because this document in Appendix A was created for Irish public relations students, UK spellings were maintained.

information that could be harmful to the business of its members. Please outline your PR strategy in response to this crisis by responding to the following questions.

Please answer all questions with a view to what the best course of action should be and do not base your answers on your own personal beliefs. For example, if you yourself agree with the vegans or the meat-eaters, it is of no relevance to this test.

1. Research

The first step in managing a crisis is to gather the facts. Rank the actions you would take in order of priority below. (1 = most effective, 2 = very effective, 3 = quite effective, 4 = slightly effective and 5 = least effective).

	A: Check media (including social media) and analyse coverage.
	B: Find out what the best practice is in your organisation and check if there is a precedent for this activity in other countries.
	C: Pull together a crisis management team consisting of the most informed people in the organisation on this topic, brief them on the situation and acquire their feedback.
	D: Contact a journalist for an "off-the-record" chat on the topic. Investigate the potential of running a negative story about the vegan group.
	E: Contact the vegan group, away from media view, to discuss and try and silence the conversation.

2. Key Messages

Your key messages should aim to present the organisation's business objectives and protect the reputation of your organisation and its members.

Choose the THREE most appropriate key messages that you think would be most effective in your communication with the media (all three choices are equal in importance).

	A: There are many benefits to eating meat and dairy.
	B: Vegans are prone to various health issues.
	C: The source of the vegan group's funding is not clear.
	D: The importance of farming and agriculture to the economy.
	E: A list of top ten healthy meat and dairy recipes.

3. Media Strategy

As part of its campaign, the vegan group has also cited a report stating that the public's consumption of meat and dairy is harming the environment. Please rank the most appropriate media approaches below (1 = most appropriate, 5 = least appropriate).

	A: Host a press conference to announce your response to the ad campaign and state your case. Invite all media to attend.
	B: Contact a select number of trusted journalists and arrange to set up feature interviews with them in which you set out your key messages and evidence-based arguments.
	C: Contact a prime-time current affairs show and request a live debate between the heads of the two organisations.
	D: Issue a press statement to all media criticising the vegan campaign and dismissing its arguments.
	E: No comment.

4. Response to Media

There has been some discussion in the media regarding the sources of funding for the vegan group's campaign. The vegan group has not

disclosed its sources.

During an interview, a journalist cites a recently published report in which it states that meat consumption must decrease significantly to avert a climate catastrophe. The journalist has asked you, as the representative for the Farmers' Association, for your response to this report.

Choose the THREE most appropriate responses below:

	A: Highlight the lack of transparency in the vegan group's finances.
	B: You agree that sustainable farming is important, but this country has one of the most sustainable records in the world.
	C: Question the accuracy of the vegan group's research.
	D: Agree with the seriousness of some of the issues presented in the report, but outline the health benefits of meat and dairy consumption.
	E: Present research and studies supporting meat and dairy consumption.

5. Arguments

Your arguments should assist the interviewer and the listener/reader in understanding your key messages. Choose the THREE most appropriate arguments to support your key messages below:

	A: An emeritus professor of agricultural policy at Trinity College Dublin has said that Ireland's agriculture is mostly grassland-based and there is no need for a reduction of 90% in meat consumption.

	B: A renowned economist from the London-based Institute of Economic Affairs, an organisation funded by the tobacco industry said that the potent combination of nanny state campaigners, militant vegetarians and environmental activists poses a real and present danger to a free society.
	C: Prior to the release of the findings of this report, the Irish Prime Minister had said that he was cutting down on his meat consumption and increasing his intake of vegetables.
	D: The Minister for the Environment, said it's really important that agriculture has a long-term strategy as to how it can contribute to decarbonisation and be competitive in an environment when people's choices and expectations may be different.
	E: A report published by a renowned environmental group has outlined a clear strategy for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in this sector in Ireland.

6. Aftermath

The immediate crisis is over and media attention has been diverted to another issue. Rank the most appropriate course of action for your organisation now (1= most appropriate, 5 = least appropriate).

	A: Correct a journalist on one radio interview in which on one occasion, they used an incorrect name for one of your representatives.
	B: Assess and analyse the media coverage and the reaction of your stakeholders/audiences.
	C: Immediately launch a high visibility campaign informing people of the benefits of consuming meat and dairy.

	D: Seek corrections in any significant inaccuracies in the media coverage.
	E: Conduct research to support your arguments and launch a campaign promoting the benefits of consuming meat and dairy products.

Situational Judgement Test II

You are the public relations manager/communications officer for an international technology company and leading producer of smartphones. One of your phone products, which is already on the market, has been found to have a defect in the batteries. The company has already sold over two million devices, but there have been reports of fires breaking out with some. As a result, all the phones now have to be recalled at a cost of over $5 million.

Please respond to the questions below to explain how you would manage this crisis.

Please answer all questions with a view to what the best course of action should be and do not base your answers on your own personal beliefs.

1. Research

The first step in managing a crisis is to gather the facts. Rank the first steps you would take to manage this crisis in order of priority below. (1 = most effective, 2= very effective, 3 = quite effective, 4 = slightly effective and 5 = least effective).

	A: Check media (including social media) and analyse coverage.

	B: Find out what the best practice is in your organisation and check if there is a precedent for this activity here or in other countries.
	C: Pull together a crisis management team consisting of the most informed people in the organisation on this topic, brief them on the situation and acquire their feedback.
	D: Contact a journalist for an "off-the-record" chat on the topic.
	E: Contact the people who have been affected, away from the eyes of the media.

2. Key Messages

Your key messages should aim to present the organisation's business objectives.

Choose the THREE most appropriate key messages that you think would be most effective in your communication with the media (all three choices should be equal in importance).

	A: We are conducting an investigation, which will result in the development of even better and safer phones.
	B: Our phones aren't the only ones on the market with safety concerns. There are some safety issues that we are aware of with competitor phones.
	C: We have launched an investigation into the problem.
	D: We can assure customers that there are no other phones or products at risk.
	E: A list of the top five safety features of this product.

3. Media Strategy

You have conducted an extensive investigation into the issue and are

now ready to release the results. Please rank the most appropriate media approaches below (1 = most appropriate, 5 = least appropriate).

	A: Announce a press conference and invite all media to attend.
	B: Contact a select number of trusted journalists and arrange to set up interviews with them in which you set out your key messages and evidence-based arguments.
	C: Contact a prime-time current affairs show and request a live interview on the topic.
	D: Issue a press statement to all media highlighting safety issues with competitor phones.
	E: No comment.

4. Response to Media

In an interview about phone safety, a journalist has thrown you a curve-ball. The journalist has decided to ask you for your views on a recently published report from a reputable medical organisation into mobile phone usage. The report warns parents to limit screen-time for children due to health risks. The journalist has asked you, as the representative of a leading manufacturer of mobile devices, for your response to this report. Choose the THREE most appropriate responses below:

	A: Dismiss the findings of this report.
	B: You agree that monitoring children's phone usage is important.
	C: Question the accuracy of this research.
	D: Encourage responsible usage of phones amongst children.
	E: Highlight some of the benefits of phone use for children, once usage is controlled by guardians.

5. Arguments

Choose the THREE most appropriate arguments to support your messages:

	A: The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health recommended time-limits and a curfew on "screen-time," but said parents need not worry that using the devices is harmful.
	B: Experts say that looking at screens such as phones, tablets or computers in the hour before bed can disrupt sleep and impact children's health and wellbeing. Spending long periods on the gadgets is also associated with unhealthy eating and a lack of exercise.
	C: Parents are often told that gadgets can pose a risk to their children, but they can in fact be a valuable tool for children to explore the world. Nevertheless, screen time should not replace healthy activities such as exercising, sleeping and spending time with family.
	D: A review published by the British Medical Journal found "considerable evidence" of an association between obesity and depression and higher levels of screen time.
	E: Although there is growing evidence for the impact of phone usage on some health issues such as obesity, evidence on the impact of screen-time on other health issues is largely weak or absent.

6. Aftermath

The immediate crisis is over and media attention has been diverted to another issue. Rank the most appropriate course of action for your organisation now (1= most appropriate, 5 = least appropriate).

	A: Correct a journalist on one radio interview in which on one occasion, they used an incorrect name for one of you representatives.
	B: Assess and analyse the media coverage and the reaction of your stakeholders/audiences.
	C: Immediately launch a high visibility campaign informing people of the safety features of your phones.
	D: Seek corrections in any significant inaccuracies in the media coverage.
	E: Analyse the findings of the investigation and launch a campaign to communicate the findings and the new safety measures in place as a result.

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. Do you think you were well prepared for the interview simulation exercise?

2. Did you enjoy the interview simulation exercise?

3. What did you like most about it?

4. What did you like least about it?

5. Do you think you learnt from the exercise?

6. What is the key thing that you think that you learnt from this experience and that you will take into the future when you graduate? Give an example.

7. Rate the experience from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) in terms of your enjoyment of the learning experience.

8. Rate the experience from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) in terms of the learning you think you achieved.

Student and Faculty/Educator Views on Diversity and Inclusion in Public Relations: The Role of Leaders in Bringing About Change

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ABSTRACT

The state of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the U.S. public relations industry lags concerningly behind increasing societal diversity. Research indicates a strong link between D&I success and leadership involvement. This qualitative study takes a slightly different approach from previous studies on the topic of leadership, D&I, and public relations. Instead of focusing on industry leadership, it focuses on public relations education. Students are the future leaders of the industry, and faculty/educators shape these future leaders. The current weak school-to-industry D&I flow, which is clearly connected to the industry's D&I problem, is the focus of this study. In-depth interviews with students and faculty/educators who stand out for their leadership and dedication to D&I revealed both groups have an accurate picture of the D&I problem in industry and education. They clearly understand the responsibility of leadership and offer suggestions for improvement. We use the views of these leaders in the education setting as a platform to explain how the education-industry D&I continuum can benefit from their knowledge, skills, and abilities and offer some concrete suggestions for actionable change.

Keywords: public relations, education, leadership, diversity, inclusion

The state of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the public relations industry in the United States is a major concern. The country is diversifying quickly, and current minority groups will collectively constitute a majority by 2050 or earlier (Lee, 2008). In the face of this reality, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018 figures report that only about 15% of the PR industry is racially diverse. Other estimates are even lower (see Chitkara, 2018). Inclusion remains an equally important concern because recruitment without inclusion hurts retention (Feloni, 2017). Furthermore, women constitute approximately 70% of the industry, while men are a minority but overwhelmingly dominate senior level positions (Logan, 2011; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Despite numerous calls and initiatives for change for over three decades, the industry's D&I needle has barely moved.

Leadership research shows a strong link between D&I success and leadership efforts. The public relations trade press is full of advice on this point. According to senior practitioner Hugo Balta (2015), "In order for diversity to fulfill its true possibility, top leaders need to create a workplace environment where employees understand that their voices are valued and accepted" (para. 5). According to Van Camp (2012), "Engage top leadership on the issue and help them understand, if they don't already, that although often hard to quantify, diversity initiatives have a significant ROI" (para. 15). However, the slim research that exists on the topic in public relations indicates that leadership engagement with D&I is concerningly low and that senior leaders see themselves as playing a much bigger role than those not in formal leadership roles (Bardhan et al., 2018).

This qualitative interview-based study takes a slightly different approach to the topic of leadership, public relations, and D&I. Instead of focusing directly on industry leadership, it focuses on education. According to Pompper (2005), "The status of public relations practice is directly linked to public relations education" (p. 299). Students are the

future leadership of the industry. How are they, and those who educate them, thinking about D&I and leadership's role in advancing D&I? Student and faculty/educator perspectives are important to understand for developing strategies and approaches for actionable change and for highlighting leadership's role and responsibility in the effort to improve the state of D&I in the education-industry continuum.

Public Relations Education and D&I

According to Brown et al. (2019), "Diversity must start at the classroom level in order for emerging practitioners to embrace diversity at the professional level" (p. 19). The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE), which currently comprises 18 national and international professional and academic communication associations and accreditation bodies, clearly emphasizes the pressing need to make D&I an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum. Founded in 1973, the CPRE plays an influential role in shaping public relations curricula through its recommendations based on surveys of educators and practitioners (DiStaso, 2019). According to its most recent survey-based report:

> In order to see D&I within the public relations industry flourish, change must begin at the academic level through a more diverse student and educator base, and through changes in how D&I is taught at the educational level. This school-to-industry pipeline will result in a more diverse workforce. (Mundy et al., 2018, p. 139)

Of particular interest to this study is that the survey found practitioners value D&I knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) slightly more than educators and note the lack of these KSAs in students currently graduating from public relations programs (DiStaso, 2019; Mundy et al., 2018).

The CPRE has also developed a comprehensive and nuanced definition of D&I based on past research (see Sha & Ford, 2007). It divides diversity into primary and secondary aspects. The primary aspects

are characteristics people are born with that cannot be changed (e.g., age, race). The secondary dimensions are those that can be altered (e.g., religion, marital status, social class). The definition emphasizes that these two dimensions of diversity play a key role in how people communicate within organizations and that understanding this phenomenon is crucial to how inclusion is practiced with internal and external publics. For overall D&I success, the CPRE emphasizes practitioners should keep in stride with the organization's external D&I environment and demographics, make full use of the diversity present within an organization to enhance work environments and relationships, be fully aware of the power differentials that might exist between the organization and its various publics, and develop mechanisms for "listening to and proactively engaging disenfranchised and other possibly marginalized groups" (Commission on Public Relations Education, n.d., para. 13).

Against the backdrop of urgent calls regarding the concerning state of D&I in the public relations industry and the need to educate students in ways that respond to this situation, the literature reveals that the bulk of research on public relations and D&I focuses on the industry with meager attention paid to education, a fact also noted by other scholars (Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Place & Vanc, 2016). More recently in June and July 2020, following the racial justice upheavals in the country, a series of live online discussions titled "Race in the PR Classroom," jointly hosted by the Institute for Public Relations and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educators Academy, focused on issues related to race and D&I that urgently need to be addressed in public relations pedagogy ("Race in the PR Classroom," n.d.). What was originally scheduled to last for only three sessions developed into a monthly series because of the valuable conversations and resources these Zoom meetings provided.

The speakers discussed the need to develop anti-racist public relations pedagogy that benefits all students and the need to disrupt

Whiteness in public relations pedagogy ("Race in the PR Classroom," n.d.). In addition, they called upon White faculty to incorporate race and D&I in their teaching/scholarship and to work as allies with faculty of color. Suggestions were offered for ways to hire more tenure-track faculty of color. The speakers also discussed the importance of bringing in diverse guest speakers and adjunct faculty of color, as well as the need to diversify the curriculum across the board rather than limiting D&I discussions to one day or to one course. Overall, there is a clear gap in knowledge on this aspect of public relations pedagogy. The scant research that does exist on D&I and public relations education is elaborated upon next.

There are at least two aspects to D&I in public relations education: (1) the curriculum and (2) the recruitment of diverse students and faculty. Combining these two aspects, what students learn and who they see around them in classrooms and related environments, impacts how they view D&I in relation to the profession and their own role and prospects in it (Brown et al., 2011; Mundy et al., 2018; Pompper, 2005; Waymer & Brown, 2018; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). Brunner's (2005) study of diversity environments at two public higher education institutions in the United States highlights that all students, both underrepresented and majority group students, take their cues on how to orient to D&I from their university environments:

> Since students come to universities at a critical time in their development as human beings, diversity is essential. During this time, students define themselves in relation to others, experiment with roles, and begin to make permanent commitments to careers, social groups, and personal relationships. (p. 4)

Brunner reviews scholarship that shows both majority and underrepresented students on more diverse campuses are likely to be more open to diverse cultures/views and navigate diversity issues in thoughtful, inclusive, and creative ways.

Through her focus group study that explored the views of African-American female practitioners, Pompper (2005) found that the curricula is "still out of step with multicultural world realities" (p. 310). Waymer and Dyson (2011), in a qualitative study on race and public relations pedagogy, made the point that while it is necessary to teach the technical skills needed to qualify for entry-level jobs, that is not enough. However, historically that has been the focus of the prescribed curriculum for undergraduate education (see McKie & Munshi, 2009). They argue that for students to be socially, ethically, and culturally attuned practitioners, they "must be prepared to engage in critical, reflective discussion and argument about the most pressing issues of contemporary society" (pp. 461-462). They further observed that while diversity and multiculturalism are emphasized in accreditation standards, content does not get included in systematic ways in the day-to-day teaching and applied work that students engage in. The authors also examined how faculty perceptions of race impact how they teach it. Faculty reported the topic of race is almost non-existent in the curriculum and in textbooks, and that the content that does exist is "shallow and misrepresented" and focuses mainly on demographics (p. 473). They expressed wanting to teach more robust and meaningful race-related content but reported the lack of materials to do this well. Back in the 1980s, public relations educator and leader Marilyn Kern-Foxworth (1989) cogently made the same point about the invisibility of the role and contributions of people of color in the major textbooks used for education. Waymer and Dyson's (2011) study suggested this invisibility had not changed much in 20 years.

Regarding the second aspect—the recruitment of diverse students and faculty—extant research suggests that for recruitment and retention to be successful, there must be a clear understanding of why students from underrepresented groups choose (or do not choose) public relations as a major, and why they stay or pick another major. Brown et al. (2011)

conducted a qualitative interview-based study of undergraduate African-American public relations students at three U.S. universities and found the reasons they chose the major was the same as other students (i.e., usually by accident, see Bowen, 2009); but once they enter the major, race plays somewhat of a role. The interviewees expressed not wanting to be pigeonholed or expected to represent their entire race and wanting to see more faculty and mentors who look like them. They also generally felt their Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter environment was not too welcoming, especially at first.

A more recent qualitative interview-based study by Waymer and Brown (2018) asked African-American, Latinx, White and Asian-American practitioners with five or fewer years of industry experience to reflect on their undergraduate education environment and how that helped or hurt them in terms of academic success and entry into the profession. While no major negatives emerged, underrepresented group participants reported being a minority was uncomfortable at times, and they felt they had to work harder than White students to prove themselves. The White respondents said while race was a non-factor for them, they were aware of how students of color had to put in additional effort. Another recent study, which focused on current students, revealed more negative findings. In a quantitative survey (N =294) of public relations majors from eight colleges and universities, Brown et al. (2019) found race and gender had a significant impact on the experiences of undergraduate public relations students. In this study, 66% of the respondents were White, 16% Latinx, 9% African-American, and 7% of other races/ethnicities. Also, only 16% of the respondents were male. Specifically, they found White female respondents, the majority demographic in most undergraduate public relations programs, have the most positive experience, both educationally as well as socially. Minority group students "were less likely to build a professional network in PR, build a strong support group among other

public relations students, and experience comfort interacting with other students in the classroom and in extracurricular activities" (p. 17). The authors suggest more diverse faculty and professionals should be visible and available to mentor underrepresented students and help them network professionally.

Place and Vanc (2016) conducted a qualitative interview-based study of mainly White undergraduate public relations students from three mid-size universities to examine if exposure to diversity through service learning and client work within coursework impacted students' views about diversity dynamics in the profession. Findings showed the students were mostly fearful of diversity, perceived it in negative ways (e.g., problem, challenge, struggle), and described diversity as something "different from me." While they generally had difficulty coming to terms with their own White privilege, the responses also indicated that the students gained some sense of how diverse client environments are and how to better understand diversity in a professional and broader social context as compared to just the personal context. The authors concluded that how public relations students orient to D&I in school has serious implications for the kinds of stereotypes, assumptions, and biases they carry into the industry. Similarly, Muturi, and Zhu (2019) conducted a quantitative survey ($N = 417$) of mainly White public relations, advertising, and journalism students at a large Midwestern university to gauge diversity exposure (with a focus on race/ethnicity) through coursework and related activity and its impact. While the public relations students seemed to fare slightly better, all students reported moderate diversity exposure and limited understanding of how race/ethnicity issues relate to the professional world. The authors of the above two studies pointed out the lack of and need for more studies on the complex dimensions of the school-to-industry D&I flow.

Regarding recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, Pompper's

(2005) study offers specific insights. Her African-American female practitioner participants reported that unfortunately, the curriculum will not improve unless diversity among faculty improves. They emphasized homogeneity among faculty equals a shortage of mentors and role models for students from underrepresented groups. This, in turn, can impact the student perception of their prospects of success. Additionally, they suggested that faculty who do not avow diverse identities often feel unprepared to teach about cultural, racial/ethnic, and other differences, and that all faculty should continually educate and train themselves to teach through the lens of multiculturalism so that students do not continue to "absorb an Anglo Eurocentric worldview that perpetuates the cycle of de-valuing, overlooking, marginalizing, pigeonholing, and stereotyping minorities" (p. 310). Others also noted the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and adjuncts, incorporating diverse guest speakers, creating experiences that expose all students to diverse experiences (e.g., shadowing, internships, mentoring, client work), training current faculty, and keeping diversity and its measurement high on the agenda of higher education leaders (Accreditation Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, 2018; Brown et al., 2019; Mundy et al., 2018; Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Place & Vanc, 2016).

Limitations of Extant Studies

Overall, the scant research on the topic suggests there is a clear need to better understand and address the D&I dynamics of public relations education and how that impacts the D&I dimensions of the industry. Extant research shows that the curriculum is still not adequately incorporating diverse course content despite ongoing calls from accreditation bodies and professional associations. Homogeneity among students and especially faculty persists, and racial/ethnic minority students who do pick public relations generally report feeling they do not belong in the major as much as White students. Underrepresented students

emphasize the need for more mentoring and networking assistance from diverse faculty and professionals. Most importantly, White students, who constitute a majority, seem not to think too much about the relationship between practice and D&I and/or struggle with diversity when exposed to it. This literature corroborates the CPRE report's finding that universities are not producing the D&I-related skills and knowledge the industry is seeking (Mundy et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the meager research that exists began only a little over a decade ago and only a handful of educators/scholars have been pursuing this topic. Diversity and inclusion in higher education, not just public relations education (and research), should be every educator's priority and not just of those who identify as belonging to underrepresented groups (Brunner, 2005; Mundy et al., 2018). Another limitation in the research landscape is that until now, studies have focused mainly on the race/ethnicity and gender dimensions of D&I in public relations education. Since race/ethnicity is a central marker of identity as well as inequity in the U.S., this focus makes sense. The gender focus also makes sense given the significant gender power imbalance in public relations education and the industry. However, more dimensions of race/ethnicity (the focus so far has mainly been on African-American and White students) and other aspects of diversity and difference, both primary and secondary, need to be studied (Mundy et al., 2018). Finally, studies of curriculum content and recruitment/retention efforts for diverse faculty and students seem to be non-existent.

Research Questions

Combining the findings of extant studies, our interest in exploring the D&I-leadership link that has not been studied before in the education context, CPRE's latest report's comprehensive definition of D&I, and its call to better prepare the school-to-industry flow to work inclusively with

diverse publics, we posed the following overarching research questions for this study:

- What are the views of current public relations student leaders and faculty/educators invested in D&I about the state of D&I in education and industry? How closely are they aligned with the recent definition of and suggestions regarding D&I forwarded by the CPRE?
- How do study participants view the role of industry leaders and educators in making D&I efforts successful?
- What do the overall findings suggest about actionable changes needed to improve the D&I dimensions of the school-to-industry flow?

Method

Qualitative in-depth interviewing was selected as the method for this study because this discovery-oriented method is well suited for examining topics on which little information exists (Kvale, 1996; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Patton, 1987). An in-depth interview is a "conversation with a purpose" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 172) that aims to get at the reality of social actors' experiences. There are various suggestions regarding how many in-depth interviews are sufficient for a study. The most common argument is that interviews can be stopped when saturation is reached (i.e., when no new information is forthcoming from the interviews). Typically, this point is achieved anywhere between 10 to 20 interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

The decision was made to recruit and interview 10 participants from two groups: undergraduate student leaders at different universities/colleges majoring in public relations and committed to D&I, and faculty/educators invested in D&I education and research at different universities/colleges. Human subjects approval was obtained for the study. A purposive sampling approach was followed. Students previously selected for scholarships and awards for their outstanding commitment to D&I were contacted. Faculty advisers of PRSSA chapters

were also contacted for recommendations of students leading the D&I charge in their chapters. Next, faculty/educators currently engaged in D&I research and education efforts were contacted and recruited. Saturation point was satisfactorily reached with these 20 interviews and, therefore, more interviewees were not recruited. All interviews were conducted between November 2018 and August 2019 over the phone, recorded with permission, and then transcribed. All interviewees were ascribed pseudonyms for confidentiality and data reporting purposes. The student interviewees comprised four seniors, five juniors and one sophomore from universities/colleges in the Midwest, East Coast, Northeast and Southern parts of the U.S. The faculty/educators ranged between 8 to 39 years in terms of teaching experience. Five had significant industry experience before entering academia (up to 35 years), four had fewer years while one had none. Tables 1 and 2 show the identity statements provided by the interviewees. Instead of collecting cultural data in a directed, closed-question format, we asked the interviewees to describe their identities in their own words.

Table 1

Student Leader Respondent Identities

Student Pseudonym/ Year	Identity Statement
Sharif (senior)	"I am a Muslim Arab Yemeni American."
Jasmine (senior)	"I am a Nigerian, American born."
Barb (senior)	"Upper middle class, White background. I was raised Catholic, Christian."

Mia (senior)	"I'm a multicultural individual and I have family from Brazil, Israel, France, Lebanon, Poland . . . a huge part of me is my nationality and my religion so I identify as a Venezuelan Jewish woman."
William (junior)	"American-Colombian. I was born in Colombia and was adopted and moved to Upstate NY when I was young. I was raised in an all-White culture in a small town."
Derek (junior)	"African-American, Black, first generation college student, urban."
Dave (junior)	"African-American homosexual male from the south who grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood . . . my cultural identity is always evolving."
Ben (junior)	"I'm American, but my mother came from Jamaica . . . I tend to be very traditional mainly because I grew up in the Panhandle, which is like deep south."
Jane (junior)	"I'm White and from a smaller rural farm community in Minnesota."
Sheena (sophomore)	"African-American woman."

Table 2

Faculty/Educator Respondent Identities

Faculty/Educator Pseudonym	Identity Statements
Laura	"I'm Caucasian."
Mimi	"Eastern European and German."

John	"A White guy from a small rural Indiana town who fortunately had an amazing career that allowed him to see the larger world."
Terrence	"I identify as African American. I am biracial. My mother is White, my father is Black."
Jerry	"I am a White male, but I am a gay southerner . . . my dad's family is from Mexico originally. My mom's family has been in North Carolina for like 300 years."
Marie	"Female, Caucasian, heterosexual, Protestant, TAB (temporarily able bodied), mid-life aged."
Shana	"I am an African American woman. That's what I am. From the south, that's also very important."
Susan	"I really kind of think of myself as White female, lower-middle class, heterosexual, highly educated."
Gordon	"I am a father, a husband, a son, Black male, born in the Southeast United States, who loves family and is concerned about how do you raise a Black boy today in the southern United States, or the United States in general. Educator. Researcher. Advocate. Political Sociologist."

Valerie	"I am a Caucasian, European American. I am a lesbian. I don't know if you care about age, I'm 64 years old. I'm middle class. So primarily your average blessed White woman."

Two closely aligned semi-structured questionnaires that included open-ended questions were developed, one for students and one for faculty/educators. All interviewees in each group were asked the same questions in the same order. Two key criteria for developing sound interview protocols were followed—alignment with research questions and inquiry-based questions to encourage conversation and in-depth perspectives (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The first set of questions were designed to elicit how students and faculty/educators understand the concepts "diversity" and "inclusion" and the relationship between them, as well as their views about the state of D&I in the public relations industry. The next set of questions asked what they believe industry leaders need to be doing to improve the situation. The final set of questions asked what they believe educators need to do to better prepare students to engage with D&I. Other demographic information was also collected.

Qualitative interviews are commonly analyzed using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is:

> an interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically event/action/interaction, and so forth, are compared against others for similarities and differences; they are also conceptually labelled. In this way, conceptually similar ones are grouped together to form categories and their subcategories. (p. 432)

Axial coding is the process of identifying the relationships between the open coding categories and subcategories and collapsing them to develop themes that describe and explain the phenomenon/condition under investigation. For each set of questions in the interview protocols

and across all 10 interviews in each group, the authors first conducted a line-by-line examination of the responses and engaged in open coding to develop categories and subcategories. Next axial coding was conducted to develop themes for each line of questioning. Finally, the authors returned to the research questions posed for the study and applied these themes to address them.

Results

In this section, we describe the results that emerged through our coding and analysis of the interviews we conducted with student leaders and faculty/educators invested in D&I.

The Relationship Between "Diversity" and "Inclusion"

Three themes emerged through open and axial coding of the responses under this first line of questioning: (1) diversity and inclusion are not the same, (2) diversity and inclusion are interlinked, and (3) definitions need to be broader, complex, and more flexible. Responses from student leaders are marked by (S) and faculty/educators by (F/E).

Diversity and Inclusion Are Not the Same

Both groups indicated they understand the difference between "diversity" and "inclusion" and that diversity does not automatically lead to inclusion. They described diversity mostly in terms of differences. According to Derek (S), diversity means people who "do not share the same agenda because of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., coming together in one place. … [it is a] combination of different cultures and different backgrounds of people." According to Laura (F/E): "I define diversity as the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of competitive individuals who represent our society without discrimination based on gender, or sexual orientation, race, religion, age, socioeconomic status, including those with disabilities and who are other abled."

Sheena (S) said diversity means "recognizing and acknowledging and respecting the different aspects of people that are visible and non-visible." Jane (S) grew up in a rural area and came to a big city to study,

and for her, diversity equals "race, social class, religion, where one grew up (rural/urban) and so on." For Mia (S), an international student, diversity equals "culture, gender, opinions, religion, race, etc." Dave (S) emphasized that diversity is an "everyday" thing and "it is what we eat, the music we listen to, what we wear, the languages we speak, and the people we speak to." Mimi (F/E) said that in the classroom context, she prefers "to define diversity in very broad terms so that everyone is contributing something to diversity" and all groups—majority and minoritized—can participate meaningfully in the conversation. Susan (F/E) emphasized a diverse organization is one that reflects the increasingly diversifying publics it attempts to connect with. Two students specifically stated that representation matters when it comes to diversity. As Dave (S) put it, you "can't be what you can't see."

Both groups described inclusion mostly in terms of equity, empowerment, and belonging. All interviewees were of the view that inclusion entails creating an environment where all, no matter their background, feel heard, empowered, a sense of belonging, that their opinions matter, and they are valued (not pigeonholed), and that all have equality in opportunities to advance. According to Laura (F/E), inclusion is "an organization's active commitment to create an open culture" and "a hospitable environment where all employees are included, productive, and feel respected and valued professionally and personally." She and another faculty/educator (John) emphasized that inclusive cultures are impossible without support from senior leadership. Both groups were clear that diversity should not be just a matter of surface-level optics. Dave (S) and Jerry (F/E) put it quite simply—inclusion means having a "true" seat at the table.

Diversity and Inclusion are Interlinked

While stating that diversity and inclusion should not be conflated, both interview groups emphasized the critical link between the two

concepts. Sheena (S) shared the story of when she visited PRSSA's national assembly and was impacted by a keynote speaker who said that diversity means being asked to the party and inclusion means being asked to dance. Sharif (S) and three faculty/educators also mentioned this often-used analogy (attributed to D&I advocate and trainer Vernā Myers), clearly indicating the impact it has had upon D&I discourse. Gordon (F/E) described the diversity-inclusion relationship using the metaphor of "an artistic tossed salad, …where people can experience and taste the flavors, but they are working toward a common goal because it's a salad. So, it's not a salad until it's all together." William (S) explained diversity is about "having an open and inviting attitude" towards various differences, and inclusion is about "acting upon it." For Derek (S), inclusion is "step two of diversity." Ben (S) said diversity and inclusion "hold hands."

Laura (F/E) explained that the term "inclusion" became popular when people began "realizing that they were getting people in the pipeline but weren't doing anything in the workplace to help them be successful." Valerie (F/E) said diversity cannot thrive without inclusion: "It's not just enough to pay lip service or say let's be tolerant. . . . it's really important that we really make an effort to learn about other people." According to Terrence (F/E):

> I think that diversity is striving for people of difference in the workplace and in the public relations environment. And inclusion is the glue that keeps them there. . . . working together in a shared space that promotes creativity and effectiveness.

Mia (S) and Jane (S) emphasized "both [diversity and inclusion] are needed in order to have change," describing "change" as the positive outcomes of diversity (Jane).

Definitions Need to be Broader, Complex and More Flexible

The majority of interviewees in both groups pointed out that current notions of diversity are too narrow and need to include both

primary and secondary dimensions of difference. Several interviewees elaborated that diversity discourse often tends to focus on race and gender, which they do not believe is a broad enough view. According to Ben (S), diversity means "an environment where you have as many perspectives as possible." In fact, Jerry (F/E) emphasized that perhaps the word "diversity" is not sufficient anymore and that we need language that better describes the complicated realities of cultural and power differences we work with in the industry. Marie (F/E) stressed the importance of considering the intersectional effects of different identity categories, for example, considering the effects of race/ethnicity and gender together rather than separately.

In making the point that diversity should be conceptualized in more complex and flexible ways, the majority of the interviewees said the industry should not define D&I too tightly. William (S) explained that diversity means different things to different people in different contexts (domestic and international) and that how we perform inclusion also changes. According to Dave (S), "The industry won't evolve if we're not evolving the definitions of the terms we're using." Several faculty/educators remarked how difficult it is to even agree on what public relations is, and that defining D&I would be an equal, if not greater, challenge. Like the students, they emphasized such an effort would be confining. A few student respondents favored a definition, stating it is hard to address a problem when one does not have a good grasp on it. Overall, both groups seemed to support the idea that something broader and less fixed, like a vision, would be helpful for building a sense of what we are collectively working towards in the industry when it comes to D&I.

State of D&I in the Public Relations Industry

The next set of questions inquired about the state of D&I in the industry. Four themes emerged under this line of questioning: (1) some

improvement but still a long way to go, (2) leaders need to be more open to change, (3) economic versus moral imperative, and (4) lack of authenticity.

Some Improvement But Still a Long Way To Go

Most of the students and about half of the faculty/educators said while there is a higher recognition of the problem and increased attention being paid to D&I, there is still a long way to go and a need for "a lot more action rather than talking" (Mia) (S). Jerry (F/E) noted that recruitment is working much better than retention. According to Terrence (F/E), efforts are in the "adolescent phase" and there is a big gap between awareness and execution/action. Like Mia (S), Valerie (F/E) said: "It seems to me that people talk about it constantly. . . . but there's no tangible evidence that we've really moved the needle." Ben (S) emphasized steps taken "need to be intentional to help ensure that the industry is reflective of the society that's constantly changing and evolving." Gordon (F/E) had a somewhat different take and said we should look at process as well as outcomes. The latter may still be far from what is needed, but the process should not be ignored because some people are sincerely trying and "it's not all just lip service."

About half of the faculty/educator respondents and a few students used words such as "abysmal," "superficial," "terrible," and "shallow" to describe the current state of D&I in the industry. John (F/E) said:

> The intention to do good is there, but the follow-through is totally lacking . . . not enough time is being spent in making sure there's the kind of understanding throughout the organization to make diversity the priority that everyone says it is.

Jasmine (S) said the state of D&I in the industry is "minimal" from what she sees at conferences and networking events and even in her own program. She said it is hard to feel welcome and thrive under these conditions. A few other students also said minority students often do not

see themselves in a public relations career. Laura (F/E) added that implicit bias is a major hurdle in the path of D&I, as are the challenges faced by multicultural individuals, especially young professionals with less confidence.

Many of the students were very direct when acknowledging that the profession is still very White. Sharif said he sees "a sea of White people" at all the conferences but that he is not surprised. He explained that his teacher said on the first day to his very diverse class (at a university in a very large city): "As beautiful as this classroom looks and the diversity that is in this class, I just want you guys to all know that the industry does not look like this."

The gender imbalance was also highlighted. Ben (S) said the industry profile is "off balance" because of the high number of women and "mostly White people in the field." Jerry (F/E) specifically emphasized the need to address gender and power disparities, which to him is a "huge" issue. Beth (S), who identifies as coming from an upper middle-class White background, said she is very aware the field is "mostly White and female." Shana (F/E) said the "White blonde sorority girl" stereotype of practitioners makes it hard for those who do not fit that image to see themselves in that role, and William (S) underscored the high need for more people of color. Gordon (F/E) said the weak school-to-industry D&I flow is a major hurdle in the path of improving the state of D&I in the industry.

Leaders Need to be More Open to Change

Shana (F/E) reiterated what research shows, stating that public relations is "a really White field. . . . [which is] incredibly tilted towards White men. . . . White men being the CEOs, and White women being the support staff." Several student interviewees brought up the topic of leadership, specifically the problem with the homogeneity of senior leadership who, according to William (S), "don't have the same

perspectives as most Americans. We need new, younger and more diverse people running the PR industry to keep up with the constant changes and positive progression." Derek (S) added that "older leadership" has been too used to doing things the same way for too long and "hiring only a certain type of identity" and producing certain types of content. He explained younger employees are coming in with new ideas and ways of doing things and there is "pushback," especially from senior leadership. He acknowledged some leaders are open to change but noted most are not. Jerry (F/E) emphasized the homogeneity of senior leadership is one of the biggest structural obstacles for D&I.

Sheena (S) noted that while there has been some progress in including more White women and LGBTQ individuals in leadership positions, there remains a clear lack of racial/ethnic diversity in top leadership. Beth (S) further pointed out it has become "normalized" to think men make better leaders, and this normalization happens not just in public relations but in larger society. A few faculty/educators explained since public relations is not a formal profession (like law or medicine), it is difficult to regulate for diversity and put more pressure on leadership. According to Terrence (F/E), only "truly effective, transformative leadership" that does not treat D&I as "window dressing" can counter all these obstacles.

Economic Versus Moral Imperative

Several faculty/educators spoke about the conflict between economic and moral imperatives. John (F/E) said the public relations world is "so driven by billability and the need to deliver results that people gravitate to those who look and think like they do, because it's more efficient and quicker to get the results." He emphasized intentionality is key and D&I has to almost be forced upon corporate America. Laura (F/E) reiterated:

The reality is that diversity will take a backseat to process, and

expediency . . . [companies are] going to take the most reliable, the easiest way for them to recruit individuals . . . it's the need and desire for companies to be efficient and make money, that is sort of the biggest obstacle to initially building in diversity into their operations.

Marie (F/E) added there is "too great a focus on the bottom line and business case arguments," and Susan (F/E) said the main reason diversity is not flourishing in the industry is the "capitalistic society that is focused on profit and short-term accomplishments." Mimi (F/E) added it is time to shift the conversation from "dollars and cents" to the "human element," or what is good for society, and therefore the profession. Sharif (S), the only student who reflected on this topic, said this is not a polarized matter and that D&I should be linked to business objectives in meaningful ways. He did, however, emphasize that leaders must be personally invested in D&I efforts "simply because it's the right thing to do."

Lack of Authenticity

Several interviewees in both groups mentioned they perceive a lack of authenticity when it comes to D&I efforts. Some cautioned diversity and inclusion are in danger of becoming just buzzwords if genuine actionable change is not achieved soon. Dave (S) made a skeptical comment, noting while D&I is being acknowledged more, it is probably because it is a trend. Sharif (S) added those with privilege need to acknowledge it, internalize it, and only then will authentic change take place. Several interviewees said another issue is that people are often afraid to offend or want to avoid conflict. Jasmine (S) insisted that, despite fears, it is important to find ways to have conversations about differences. Dave (S) expressed it is "more respectful to take the next step" (rather than be afraid) and say one wants to learn, so we can work together to make this world a better place.

The Responsibility of Industry Leadership

Two themes emerged under this line of questioning: (1) lead by example and communicate, and (2) personal engagement, responsibility, and accountability. The relationship between D&I and leadership inevitably came up in the previous lines of questioning, but this section got to the heart of this matter.

Lead by Example and Communicate

Both groups emphasized leaders should lead by example, although students emphasized this point a little more than faculty/educators. According to Jane (S):

> It has to start with top management because if they don't lead on it then it gets pushed down and doesn't happen. They should make sure there is equal opportunity and that staff reflects the audience they are trying to reach. You can't aim for a diverse audience if you only have one person of color on a team of like eight White people. It just doesn't work. That's when campaigns fail.

Mia added: "I think it always starts with setting an example."

Most of the interviewees said leaders must walk the talk, be authentic in their efforts, and that lip service is not enough. Ben (S) said leaders should be "pioneers" in communicating about D&I. He elaborated D&I language often gets put in writing (e.g., mission statements) and then forgotten. He emphasized it is the leader's "responsibility to be talking about these things and pushing these things and being as transparent as possible," and that even if D&I efforts aren't going so well or are just beginning, it is important to admit faults and mistakes and set up dialogue. Valerie (F/E) pointed out the importance of good leadership communication:

> I think most of the people I can think of who run major organizations, corporations, they certainly do not come from a communication background and they do not understand the value

and the power of communications. They think they do, but they
really don't.

Terrence (F/E) said, "We need leaders to be leading conversations. . . .
they do not have to provide the answers, but if they are asking provocative
questions and getting the right people sitting around the table, that can
help produce change." He emphasized listening as a lost art that must be
revived. Jasmine (S) said leaders should not communicate about D&I in
"stock" ways as though they're "just trying to fill a quota" but in genuine
ways that convey a real desire "to make the environment more diverse."
She and Mia (S) also mentioned the importance of leadership talking
about more than just racial diversity and about "people from different
communities, different walks of life" (Mia). According to Mia (S), "The
message should be to unite and to be inclusive and to think of equality, but
in a much, much deeper sense, you know?"

Shana (F/E) said that unfortunately, leaders tend to focus more
on the business aspect and less on the importance of communication in
building healthy, diverse and inclusive work environments. Gordon (F/E)
emphasized leaders need to be able to communicate to others why building
relationships across differences (employees, clients, publics and other
stakeholders) is important for the profession itself and for building a sense
of community. Susan (F/E) referred to this as the need to communicate
for "the greater good." Dave (S) said leaders need to "communicate
realistically" and help others understand that things they might be doing
may not be inclusive. Beth (S) added leaders should be "approachable
and easy to talk to" and make everyone comfortable, that they should
not simply listen but also encourage people to speak up. William (S)
emphasized leaders need to share more positive and personal stories about
how D&I engagement helped them in work and life and how they have
overcome obstacles to bring about change. He added leaders should also
include students (i.e., future leaders) in these conversations.

Personal Engagement, Responsibility and Accountability

Both groups agreed that D&I success and authenticity is just not possible without support and engagement from the top. Sheena (S) said:

I remember reading that research shows that employees are more engaged and creative and empowered when their senior leaders and people in the C-suite are the champions for diversity and inclusion. They have to set the tone and the precedent and let employees know all have value and that's important in the culture and success of the company.

Several faculty/educators noted how senior leaders tend to delegate the hiring process. John (F/E) explained:

The hiring decisions keep getting pushed down lower and lower in the organization, and unless in that hiring chain are diverse minds, they are going to hire someone who looks like themselves and thinks like they do.

He emphasized senior leaders should be involved in hiring for diversity, mentoring diverse junior employees, and building inclusive work cultures.

Personal engagement was linked to responsibility and accountability. Valerie (F/E) said, "We need hard data and CEOs willing to look at that data and make some tough decisions and make it a priority because the demographics that they're serving in this country are changing so rapidly." She added that "we really don't see a lot of bold moves to make the field look different," and that agency leaders need to come together and work collectively on D&I. Jerry (F/E) emphasized accountability, explaining "that it's not just creating a diverse board of leadership, but there's got to be some kind of accountability in terms of what they do with D&I initiatives in terms of moving the needle." Laura (F/E) said leaders need to take responsibility for outcomes: "One of the ways we measure success is how effective we are in recruiting and retaining diverse professionals, and I think that can only come from the top."

Most of the students remarked that industry leaders need to change their attitudes and perspectives regarding D&I and be more open to feedback. According to Sheena (S), leaders need to be "intentional" in their D&I work and in "reevaluating agency culture." John (F/E) said agencies should not just hire diverse people and then "cut the bait the minute they stumble the first time." Instead, leaders should be personally asking how they can help them succeed and what they themselves might be doing wrong. Laura (F/E) added leaders need to: "figure out ways that they can empower the leaders below them to be inclusive and welcoming and empowering people to do good work based on their capabilities and not on what their skin color is, not pigeonholing people."

Terrence (F/E) emphasized values, stating they "allow the organization to make decisions that embrace diversity and inclusion." According to Laura (F/E), those heading D&I "should have a seat at the table for high level corporate strategies." Derek (S) observed that only those leaders and professionals who themselves identify as belonging to marginalized groups tend to talk about D&I and "that's not good enough." He said "more learning and unlearning of unconscious bias" needs to happen and "old mentalities" can only change if more diverse leaders are in place and if current leaders can be more self-reflective, open-minded, and able to talk courageously about the biases they hold and how they're working on undoing them.

What Can Educators Do?

Three themes emerged for this line of questioning: (1) diversifying curriculum, (2) paying attention to the learning environment, and (3) educator responsibility and structural change.

Diversifying Curriculum

Both groups strongly emphasized that the curriculum needs to be diversified and D&I content should be infused organically into all the courses throughout the curriculum. According to Mia (S), "Every single

thing that has to be taught can be taught within diversity and inclusion itself. So, I think it is something that goes with educating in general." Derek (S) agreed and said D&I should not be treated as an add-on topic. He explained that at his university a professor offers a special topics course on D&I; however, only those interested tend to take it. Some of the respondents in both groups also supported the value of stand-alone D&I courses along with diversification of curriculum. Beth (S) said special courses "that really dig into the topic" could be useful not just to public relations students but also to those in related majors.

Several students noted the importance of including diverse authors and having diverse practitioners come to speak in classes. According to Mia (S), "We love listening from different people that come from all over the country, all over the world even. That is so impactful." Diverse practitioners, students emphasized, could effectively mentor underrepresented students and help them feel empowered. Almost all the faculty/educators also emphasized the importance of bringing diverse guest speakers into the classrooms so students can learn directly from them. A few of them also highly recommended study-abroad courses that help students understand cultural differences in embodied and fully immersed ways. Terrence (F/E) said, "I think students need to be pushed outside of their comfort zone. For them to understand difference, they have to see difference." He also mentioned using role playing activities in classes to help students embody difference. Shana (F/E) added that "pushing your students and giving them new experiences and new ways to think about things and new people to talk with and communicate with is very important. . . . you need to challenge them." Mimi (F/E) shared an example of how she does this:

> I worked with a colleague at a university in another state and her student population is a less traditional population, and it has a more minority population than mine does. It was an online

course, and we made them work in groups together on a PR plan
. . . . It was interesting just to see their reactions to it and just how
different . . . . My students were like, "Well, we want to meet at
midnight or whatever to talk about this." And the students at the
other school would say, "Well, I have to work. I'm taking this part-
time," and just trying to see how those differences work.

William (S) and Jasmine (S) added that organizing specific D&I
workshops and industry tours would also be helpful.

Paying Attention to the Learning Environment

Along with curriculum, both groups emphasized the criticality
of the learning environment for D&I to flourish (or perish). Ben (S)
said teachers must "be mindful of everyone . . . and get students into the
rhythm of constantly thinking about everyone and how everyone's going
to perceive something." Sheena (S) said teachers should make sure they
are being inclusive in the classroom and holding their students responsible
when they are not. She added they can do this by "creating an environment
of inclusiveness and feeling welcome. You know what I mean? . . . of
belonging." Jerry (F/E) said it is necessary to "embed cues into our
[classroom] culture that indicate to people that they're welcome." He
shared how he includes an inclusion statement in all his syllabi and talks
about its importance in building an inclusive classroom environment. He
said he has had great success with this, and many students have expressed
their appreciation.

Terrence (F/E) emphasized educators must learn how to have
difficult conversations about differences in classrooms. Several faculty/
educators explained how they try to make their classrooms more inclusive
and help students engage with difference in experiential and embodied
ways. Sharif (S) emphasized this is especially important because students
of color often feel like they do not belong and lack confidence in
classrooms dominated by White students. Mimi (F/E) said she pays special

attention to see if someone is struggling or feeling isolated, and tries to find "someone who has a similar background that could be a mentor, or just someone who might understand some of the feelings that they might be feeling." John (F/E) said students tend to gravitate towards their "own kind," so he mixes them up in how they sit and team up for assignments.

As a minority-identifying educator, Terrence (F/E) said he attempts to serve as a role model for all, but especially for underrepresented students. Shana (F/E) emphasized self-reflexivity and the necessity for educators "to first examine our own biases, who we favor in our classrooms and who we favor as leaders." Jasmine (S) said educators should humanize themselves and talk more about their own experiences and struggles with D&I. She added they should "not just lecture" but help students have more "diverse conversations." According to Dave (S), an effective way for educators to address D&I is by "helping students see the disadvantages of not being diverse in our industry. Once they see that, then they can appreciate the positive."

Educator Responsibility and Structural Change

Just like in the case of industry leaders, both groups brought up the responsibility factor for faculty/educators as they are leaders in the academic setting. Faculty/educators spoke more about it. Laura (F/E) explained as an educator it is her responsibility to do at least three things. First, she strives to educate students "on the core understandings, knowledge, and skillsets that they need to make an informed decision if they want to pursue a PR career." Next, she teaches them to expect and face the challenges of working in a "primarily White workplace," and third, she teaches them "how to advocate for themselves." Marie (F/E) also said she teaches "her students how to be consultants and advocates for D&I thinking." Sharif (S) said teachers should emphasize that D&I is "important not only for the bottom line but also for humanity and for understanding privilege and disparities between people from different

backgrounds and how D&I aims to make a more equal world." On a hopeful note, Mimi (F/E) observed that the current generation is much more aware about D&I issues than previous ones, and this could mean progress in the near future.

John (F/E), who identifies as a White male educator, emphasized that in his experience, only faculty who identify as minorities tend to make a real effort to engage with D&I, and that this needs to change. Susan (F/E), who identifies as a White female educator, said it is every educator's responsibility to widen the lens and help underrepresented students see the many values and applications of public relations. Gordon (F/E), who identifies as a Black male educator, also made this point. Faculty/ educator respondents who have held or hold administrative roles stressed the need for major structural changes. They emphasized recruiting more diverse faculty and working with admissions/recruitment to better target diverse high school students. Terrence (F/E) recommended "intentionality, communication, thinking differently, thinking creatively, and going into places that are otherwise either ignored or not getting the same attention as other schools because they're not as mainstream." Susan (F/E) said programs doing a good job with D&I should be recognized widely and upheld as models for others to emulate. Finally, several faculty/educators said education and industry must work together more systematically to recruit and offer opportunities (e.g., internships, scholarships) in ways that promote D&I.

Discussion

This study spotlights the weak state of the school-to-industry D&I flow in public relations. It also points out the role and responsibility of leadership in bringing about change across the education-industry continuum. The findings support the literature reviewed to a large extent, highlight the current inadequate state of D&I in public relations pedagogy, and acknowledge the recent CPRE report's concern that "practitioners

value job candidates who enter the workforce with a strong, multicultural professional lens, yet they do not see that perspective reflected among entry-level candidates to the extent they would like" (Mundy et al., 2018, p. 143). What this study adds is the important role of leadership across the education-industry continuum. Leadership engagement is crucial for D&I success. Students and faculty/educator D&I thought leaders are well positioned to catalyze the breakthroughs and wider engagement needed to make the D&I needle move faster and improve the school-to-industry D&I flow. Industry leaders need to step up and work with them on this bridging project.

We now return to the research questions posed earlier and offer some actionable suggestions that span the education-industry continuum. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

What are the views of current public relations student leaders and faculty/educators invested in D&I about the state of D&I in education and industry? How closely are they aligned with the recent definition of and suggestions regarding D&I forwarded by the CPRE?

The themes that emerged from our data clearly indicate both students and faculty/educators invested in D&I in public relations have a clear sense of the complexities, nuances, and challenges infusing the issue. Their views align with the CPRE's comprehensive description of D&I. A majority of respondents emphasized the need to widen the definition of diversity and include more differences in addition to gender and race/ethnicity (i.e., secondary dimensions of difference one may not be born with, such as religion, marital status, and veteran status). Both groups understand that diversity and inclusion are not the same thing and that recruiting diverse employees does not automatically lead to inclusion. Inclusion to them is an attitude and culture wherein all, despite differences, are empowered and respected. In fact, both groups

emphasized the importance of inclusion, stating diversity simply cannot thrive without successful inclusion. Neither group was in favor of defining D&I too tightly because they believe the dimensions of D&I are dynamic and change with the times and with context. However, they believe some guidelines are needed for collective industry action.

Both groups also have an accurate picture of the current state of D&I in the industry. They believe while some improvement has occurred, much still needs to be done. They are well aware of predominant power differentials, the need for structural changes that support D&I, and that the industry does not reflect the diversity of the society in which it exists. They clearly see the link between D&I success and leadership support, and squarely put most of the responsibility for the current concerning situation on industry leaders, emphasizing D&I efforts must be genuine and authentic. It must be noted, though, that our study participants are academic leaders engaged in the D&I conversation who have taken it upon themselves to be well informed. However, this does not minimize the depth and value of their perceptions and views. In fact, as we will soon make the case, these leaders are valuable resources for improving the current situation in the education-industry continuum.

How do study participants view the role of industry leaders and educators in making D&I efforts successful?

As mentioned, both groups clearly see the importance of the support and genuine/personal engagement of senior leadership for D&I to be successful. They believe leaders need to lead on D&I by setting examples of behaviors and communication for others to emulate, being open to attitude and culture change, engaging in more intentional D&I work, exploring their own unconscious biases, and not being afraid to admit mistakes and learn from them. According to the students, leaders should humanize themselves, openly talk about their own struggles with D&I, be approachable, and communicate honestly about D&I

on an everyday basis. Students also emphasized that older and more homogenous leadership needs to move out of its comfort zone and be more open to new identities and newer ways of practicing the profession. Faculty/educators emphasized industry leaders need to organize better for D&I, lead the conversation, keep in mind the greater societal good, and hold themselves and each other accountable in genuine and measurable ways. Both groups agreed the economic imperative should not be privileged over the D&I moral imperative.

Both groups also emphasized the leadership role of faculty/educators in enhancing D&I in education. They outlined various ways in which curriculum and learning environments need to be revamped for D&I and emphasized the need to recruit more diverse faculty and students. It was underscored that learning environments should be more inclusive, and D&I must not be treated superficially and reduced to a commodity because this can prevent diverse students from feeling they can truly belong. These responses support what the literature review reports. Faculty/educators particularly pointed out that structural changes need to occur in higher education administration to improve recruitment and retention of both students and faculty. They also emphasized all educators, not just those who avow minoritized identities, must take responsibility for D&I in public relations pedagogy, teach all students (majority and minority) to be strong D&I advocates, and work with the industry to establish better school-to-industry D&I connections.

Actionable Suggestions

What do the overall findings suggest about actionable changes needed to improve the D&I dimensions of the school-to-industry flow? Our findings suggest public relations students and faculty/educators invested in D&I have an accurate and up-to-date grasp on the D&I situation, and that the education-industry continuum can benefit from their knowledge, skills, and abilities. In conclusion, we offer some suggestions

and strategies for improving the state of D&I across the education-industry continuum.

     1. There is a need to organize D&I leadership forums and networks that connect students, faculty/educators, and industry leaders so they can work collectively and systematically to build creative programs and initiatives that enhance the conversation on D&I, develop focused exchanges between education and industry, and track the school-to-industry D&I flow. Such forums and networks should emphasize that D&I is every student's, educator's, and practitioner's responsibility, and not just of those who avow underrepresented identities. They should also emphasize the importance of inclusion for diversity to thrive, allyship and the need for authenticity and intentionality in D&I efforts.

     2. Faculty/educator D&I thought leaders need to work collectively with peers and accreditation bodies to enhance curriculum for D&I and develop needed courses and content. Such efforts should also focus on assisting those educators who feel they need assistance with teaching through a D&I lens and building inclusive learning environments. This could be accomplished through workshops, webinars, training, special topics conferences, and overall systematic collaboration, dialogue, and information sharing.

     3. Faculty/educator and student D&I thought leaders need to work consistently with administration, recruitment officers, and other relevant units on their campuses on developing strategies to step up recruitment and retention of diverse students and faculty. Because context is important, they should take stock of what the specific D&I needs and challenges of their campuses are.

     4. Student D&I thought leaders need to work consistently with peers across the country (e.g., through PRSSA chapters) as D&I ambassadors to share knowledge and experiences, build dialogue, develop programming, and educate others about the importance of D&I

knowledge, abilities, and skills as entry-level qualifications necessary for success in industry. Educators and industry leaders must be personally engaged as guides and champions of such efforts.

The current weak school-to-industry D&I flow does not bode well for the future of the industry. Student and faculty/educator leaders committed to D&I success could be change agents in public relations pedagogy and serve as a strong bridge between education and industry.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is that it only focused on D&I leaders in the education setting. Other faculty and student voices should be included in future studies to gauge the differences between their views and those leading on D&I. This information would be useful for generating future changes. A broader study, for example a quantitative survey of students and faculty/educators who do not stand out as leaders when it comes to D&I, would enhance the findings of this study. Second, including leadership literature that links D&I success with engaged leadership could shed more light on the leadership dimensions of D&I in the public relations education-industry continuum. Future studies could focus on this aspect. Third, as one of our participants suggested, public relations education programs that are doing well with regards to D&I should be upheld as models for others to emulate. Studies that spotlight such programs and explore the reasons behind their success would be valuable additions to the literature.

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PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2020

Synthesizing Primary and Secondary Research to Drive Strategy: A Final Project for a Strategic Communication Research Course

Danielle LaGree, Kansas State University

Rationale

The ability to sort through data to find insight and opportunity, and determine what is meaningful and meaningless, is critical for PR graduates entering the profession (Lum, 2017). Additionally, conducting research and developing strategy informed by data is the bedrock of the PR process (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). Students' success in PR is dependent on their ability to not only conduct primary and secondary research but also synthesize what this data means relevant to the organizational context, challenges, opportunities, and goals.

A research white paper, the final project for a strategic communication research course, allows the opportunity for students to leverage what they have learned throughout the semester, synthesizing data from a broad perspective to drive strategy. Students are provided with a hypothetical scenario about a real organization, as well as a fictional data set. They must confidently convey their conclusions and recommendations

in an easy-to-read, visually appealing report functional for busy executive decision-makers. This project helps students understand how research comes full circle, illustrating its role in PR planning and execution.

Student Learning Goals

1. Demonstrate understanding of how research data benefits and informs PR strategy and tactics.
2. Demonstrate ability to interpret data as it relates to organizational context, challenges, opportunities, and goals.
3. Successfully utilize research from credible secondary sources to further synthesize primary data and support/justify recommendations.
4. Confidently communicate research conclusions and strategic recommendations using the written word and visuals, such as charts, graphs, and images.

Connection to Public Relations Practice

This assignment connects to the PR process known as ROPES (Page & Parnell, 2018) because it emphasizes research as a necessary starting point for producing effective, strategic PR initiatives. It provides the experience today's PR graduates need to confidently recommend sound strategy informed by data.

Assessment of Student Learning

- Assignment example: http://bit.ly/ResearchWhitePaper
  (All student authors have provided permission to have their work used publicly.)
- Since implementing this assignment as the final project (in addition to other course changes), students' self-report of "confidence handling research and data" moved from the bottom four rankings of student learning outcomes to the top four.
- "I liked that I could see how everything connects and how it would be presented to a client. There were no gaps, and I wasn't left asking

how it would actually work in the 'real world.' I appreciated the challenge of having primary and secondary research to synthesize into recommendations. It was difficult at first, but I realized it made our presentation so much more credible and interesting. Before this class, I could not confidently connect data back to suggestions I was making. This project was challenging because I was forced to do just that." – senior female

- "I never thought I would say this about a research class, but this final project has been one of my favorites... I feel like the white paper really does a great job of incorporating everything we've learned this semester. We had to come up with a creative way to communicate our insights so that anyone could understand them, whether they're an expert in this topic or not." – senior male

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Appendix: Final Research White Paper Assignment

Client: National Park Foundation*

*This is a real organization but a hypothetical scenario

Background and Situation

The National Park Foundation (NPF) has made significant strides developing modern communications that have increased awareness about the organization. However, its most recent campaign, "Find Your Park," is underperforming. Although it boosted awareness, it did not significantly increase national park visits. Additionally, the communications team believes there is a lack of understanding of what NPF actually does.

Your team was hired to conduct a nationwide survey, analyze and communicate the results, and recommend three creative strategies for NPF's next targeted campaign. NPF wants this campaign to increase understanding of what NPF does, ultimately cultivating long-term support for and appreciation of NPF's efforts.

Your results analysis should reveal insights about the following:

1. Understanding and perceptions of the National Park Foundation
2. Perceptions of national parks as a travel destination
3. Media use behaviors related to the outdoors/travel

Assume you already distributed the survey and a statistician ran the data (see results in section titled "Survey Results"). You will interpret the data and communicate results in a visual and meaningful way to the client, meaning that you should clearly make the connection between insights, how the insights are relevant to the client's situation, and how the insights inform your creative strategies.

Deliverables: White Paper

"A white paper is a persuasive, authoritative, in-depth report on a specific topic that presents a problem and provides a solution" (HubSpot, 2018, para. 5). Click here for more information on white papers.

There are a lot of free resources to make your white paper visually appealing. I recommend using Canva to design your white paper or Adobe InDesign if you are comfortable.

Your white paper should be no more than 8 pages in length and consist of the following sections:

- **Cover Page**: Title your white paper and include author information.
- **Executive Summary**: An executive summary is a brief snapshot of the entire white paper. In two to three paragraphs, explain the purpose of the white paper; in three to four paragraphs, identify the most important findings and provide a brief overview of your creative strategies.
- **Survey Results**: Use charts, graphs, icons, or other visuals. (as well as words to support the visuals) to visually communicate the survey results. This means that the client can skim the report and easily understand key information. Additional commentary should support the "hard data" to explain what it means/how it is relevant to the client's situation.
- **Supporting Insights**: Use secondary research from at least three different sources to provide additional information you think would be valuable for the client, given the survey results. This section should include three to five key insights.
- **Creative Strategies**: In this section, you will recommend three creative strategies that are informed by your survey data and secondary insights. These are strategies (not tactics), which means they should be broad ideas that align with what the client wants to accomplish.

Evaluation

10 pts.   **Executive Summary |** Provides a snapshot of the entire white paper and includes the following information: purpose of the report, three to four of the most important findings, and a discussion of how the client can move forward. Persuasive argumentation is evident.

25 pts.   **Survey Results |** Visuals clearly and appropriately illustrate all survey results; attention to question type and standard deviation is demonstrated; results are communicated in a way that reflects what the client wanted to learn from the research and why the data is relevant/meaningful.

25 pts.   **Secondary Insights |** Insights come from established, credible sources; relevant and meaningful in light of client's situation and goals; necessary details are included (e.g., survey population); sources are cited appropriately.

25 pts.   **Creative Strategies |** Three clear strategies are provided that align with the client's situation and challenge. Strategies are appropriate given primary and secondary data.

10 pts.   **Design and Formatting |** Visually appealing, creative, reflects the brand's look and feel. Entire white paper flows well from start to finish; is no more than 8 pages in length (excluding cover page); different sections are easily recognizable; cover page is professional yet creative.

5 pts.   **Writing Technicalities and Tone |** No spelling/grammatical errors; professional and confident tone.

National Park Foundation Survey Results (note: fictitious data)
SURVEY DATA ($N = 1,500$)

Question	Results
I understand that the National Park Foundation serves all national parks by protecting them for generations to come. (yes/no)	AGE 21-30: Yes = 72%; No = 28% 31-40: Yes = 37%; No = 63% 41-50: Yes = 44%; No = 56% 51+: Yes = 87%; No = 13%
Which of the following efforts do you most associate with NPF? (check all that apply) __ Protecting the wilderness __ Connecting children to the outdoors __ Supporting local communities __ Inspiring the next generation of park stewards and enthusiasts	(41%) Protecting the wilderness (17%) Connecting children to the outdoors (5%) Supporting local communities (8%) Inspiring the next generation of park stewards and enthusiasts
The National Park Foundation:* • is an apolitical organization (i.e., not affiliated with any particular political group) • is essential for protecting public lands • helps me understand how I can contribute to protecting public lands • is successful in advocating for all national parks • is a good resource for planning trips to national parks (*Likert scale 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	• is an apolitical organization ($M = 2.3$; $SD = 0.5$) • is essential for protecting public lands ($M = 6.2$; $SD = 0.7$) • helps me understand how I can contribute to protecting public lands ($M = 4.5$; $SD = 1.4$) • is successful in advocating for all national parks ($M = 3$; $SD = 1.8$) • is a good resource for planning trips to national parks ($M = 1.5$; $SD = 0.5$)
To me, visiting national parks as a travel destination with family and friends is**: Easy - - - - - - Complicated Appealing - - - - - - Not appealing Time consuming - - - -Not time consuming Affordable - - - - - - Expensive (**Semantic differential scale 1-7)	• Easy-Complicated ($M = 6.1$; $SD = 0.3$) • Appealing-Not appealing ($M = 2$; $SD = 0.6$) • Time consuming-Not ($M = 1.4$; $SD = 1.8$) • Affordable-Expensive ($M = 1$; $SD = 0.5$)
I would like to learn about the following regarding travel planning to national parks (check all that apply): __Places to stay in/near national parks __Community events/festivals in/near national parks __Live entertainment in/near national parks __Immersive outdoor experiences in/near national parks	• Places to stay in/near national parks (80%) • Community events/festivals in/near national parks (22%) • Live entertainment in/near national parks (15%) • Immersive outdoor experiences in/near national parks (95%)

Question	Results

Which of the following forms of communication/media do you prefer to learn about outdoor travel destinations? (check all that apply)
• Facebook
• Instagram
• Promotional emails
• Recommendations from friends and/or family
• Other (please specify)_____
	DATA BY AGE GROUP
	21-30:
	• Facebook (40%)
	• Instagram (89%)
	• Promotional emails (50%)
	• Recommendations from friends and/or family (70%)
	• Other (please specify)_____
	  Google search; travel bloggers; Insta stories
	
	31-40:
	• Facebook (51%)
	• Instagram (78%)
	• Promotional emails (62%)
	• Recommendations from friends and/or family (80%)
	• Other (please specify)_____
	  Netflix documentaries/features; Google search; mom bloggers on Instagram
	
	41-50:
	• Facebook (67%)
	• Instagram (54%)
	• Promotional emails (75%)
	• Recommendations from friends and/or family (91%)
	• Other (please specify)_____
	  Tripadvisor; Google search; magazines (*Family Circle*, *Parents*)
	
	51+:
	• Facebook (85%)
	• Instagram (15%)
	• Promotional emails (27%)
	• Recommendations from friends and/or family (78%)
	• Other (please specify)_____
	  Tripadvisor, Yelp, Google search
	  _____

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2020

Diverse Voices in the History of Public Relations

Arien Rozelle, St. John Fisher College

Editorial Record: Submitted to AEJMC-PRD GIFT Competition by Feb. 21, 2020. A blind copy was peer reviewed by the PRD Teaching Committee, led by Chair Chris McCollough, and selected as a Top GIFT. Top GIFT winners were notified on April 1, 2020. First published online on August 15, 2020.

Rationale

In 2018, the Commission on Public Relations Education released a report on undergraduate PR education, *Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners*, in which diversity and inclusion was noted as being a key area of emphasis. In the section "Diversity: An Imperative Commitment for Educators and Practitioners," the report states:

> Efforts to improve D&I knowledge must start at the academic level. We recommend educators place focus on how diversity and multicultural perspectives are taught in the classroom, and commit to integrating D&I focused topics and discussions in the curriculum. (p. 139)

This assignment, "Diverse Voices in the History of Public Relations," takes a historical approach to this directive, allowing students to discover important and diverse figures in the history of public relations.

In October 2018, the PRSA Foundation, in partnership with the Museum of Public Relations, published the book *Diverse Voices: Profiles in Leadership* (Spector & Spector, 2018), featuring profiles of more than

40 multicultural leaders in the field of public relations. *Diverse Voices* served as the inspiration for this assignment, which was given to students in Introduction to Public Relations during a unit about the history of public relations. In this assignment, students are asked to research a lesser-known figure in the history and evolution of the field, and produce a two-page paper about their life, work, and lasting contribution to the field of public relations.

Student Learning Goals

- Learn about the history and development of public relations.
- Identify a relatively "unknown" public relations practitioner, their contributions to the field of public relations, and their long-term impact on the field.
- Emphasize the importance of diversity in the field of public relations.
- Apply information learned from research sources and course content.
- Familiarize students with the Museum of Public Relations and the *Journal of Public Relations Research*.

Connection to Public Relations Practice

The Public Relations Society of America (n.d.) has identified Diversity & Inclusion as an area of emphasis, stating:

> While the practice of public relations in the United States has undergone dramatic changes, a lack of diversity in the communications profession persists. Many studies indicate that the industry still struggles to attract young black, Asian and Hispanic professionals to pursue public relations as their career of choice. (para. 1)

As the public relations industry makes a push toward greater diversity and inclusion, it's important that we educate future public relations practitioners about the diverse voices in the history and evolution of modern public relations. While many public relations textbooks still refer to the "founding fathers" of public relations, this assignment asks students

to go beyond the stories and lives of P.T. Barnum, Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays, and Arthur W. Page.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

Most students were excited to explore diverse figures in public relations and appreciated working on an assignment related to diversity. Many students reported they were surprised by what they found and appreciated the social justice connections to this assignment. Here is a sampling of student responses to the assignment (shared with their permission):

"It surprised me just how much our textbooks do not tell us about the beginnings of public relations. I found the assignment very beneficial to my understanding of PR, as it completed the goals you listed, and I would recommend it to future classes you teach." – Justin L.

"The assignment allowed me to research and become aware of important figures within the PR field that have historically been left out of the conversation or have not received recognition for their work. The research done to complete this assignment showed that the PR industry has plenty of room for growth and improvement in hopes of becoming a more inclusive field, so all groups can be represented and heard effectively. This assignment was one of my favorites." – Madison B.

"This assignment helped me understand the importance of diversity because with just reading the textbook I would have never known that there were diverse people in public relations. With this assignment I was allowed to research and learn about so many different people and see what they contributed to public relations." – Emma A.

"I enjoyed this assignment because I was able to research public relations

practitioners who have made great contributions to the field but don't get the recognition that they necessarily deserve. I also thought it was helpful because we were able to explore diversity in the field." – Gabriella G.

References

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Appendix

Diverse Voices in the History of Public Relations Assignment

Students are asked to research a lesser-known figure in the history and evolution of the field and produce a two-page paper about their life, work, and lasting contribution to the field of public relations.

After students have read "The History of Modern Public Relations" (Chapter 2), from *Introduction to Strategic Public Relations* (Page & Parnell, 2018), they are given a starting point—a list of historical figures in public—and are asked to choose one person they would like to learn about. The responsibility of further, in-depth research is then in the hands of the student. This student-centered approach to learning shifts the responsibility from the professor as storyteller to the student as historical investigator and storyteller. This independence and ability to choose

gives students a bit of autonomy over their work, relieves added research pressure, and allows them to focus on developing curiosity and critical thinking through this assignment.

Through their research, students take an inquiry-based approach, acquiring new knowledge by investigation. They build on their existing knowledge of the history of public relations through this assignment and begin to take a more critical approach to the way that the history of public relations has been presented in many textbooks. In doing so, this assignment empowers students to learn about diverse voices in the history of the field and to understand some of the critical issues of diversity and inclusion that still persist today.

Directions

In order to discover diverse voices in the historical development of public relations, this assignment asks students to conduct research and to tell the story of one of the following public relations practitioners:

- Joseph V. Baker
- Ofield Dukes
- Doris Fleischman
- Muriel Fox
- Barbara W. Hunter
- Inez Kaiser
- Moss Kendrix
- Betsy Plank

Students are asked to consider the following:
- Who is the person, where are they from, where did they work?
- Why are they important to the field of public relations? What were their major contributions to the field of public relations?

- What is the long-term impact of their work on the field of public relations?
- How did/does their legacy continue to shape the field of public relations today, specifically with respect to the need for greater diversity and inclusion in the industry?

Required Readings/Research

- "The History of Modern Public Relations" (Chapter 2), from *Introduction to Strategic Public Relations* (Page & Parnell, 2018)
- http://www.prmuseum.org
- *Journal of Public Relations Research* or another academic journal from the library
- A news article from a credible source such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*

Deliverable

A two-page research paper about the life, work, and lasting contribution of a diverse voice in the history of public relations.

Points	Elements of Review	
(10)	Opening/Intro	The opening paragraph states what the paper is about and gets the reader's attention.

Points	Elements of Review	
(55)	Middle Paragraphs	Middle paragraphs apply information learned from research sources and course content by answering the following questions: • Who is the person, where are they from, where did they work? (10 points) • Why are they important to the field of public relations? What were their major contributions to the field of public relations? (15 points) • What is the long-term impact of their work on the field of public relations? (15 points) • How did/does their legacy continue to shape the field of public relations today, specifically with respect to the need for greater diversity and inclusion in the industry? (15 points) • How did/does their legacy continue to shape the field of public relations today, specifically with respect to the need for greater diversity and inclusion in the industry? (15 points)
(10)	Closing Paragraph	The closing paragraph summarizes the paper and draws conclusions related to course content.
(10)	References	Cites required sources listed in assignment instructions.

Points	Elements of Review	
(5)	Formatting	Assignment follows formatting instructions.
(10)	Grammar and punctuation	Sentences are fluent and effective. Very few errors in mechanics, punctuation and word usage.

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2020

Graph Interpretation Exercises for the Public Relations Classroom: An Environmental Scanning Approach

Lauren Bayliss, Georgia Southern University

Rationale

The activities in this exercise allow public relations students to practice using data for environmental scanning (see Appendix A for the assignment description). Graphs make data accessible to students even if they have never studied statistics or quantitative methods. Students take part in a series of short, in-class exercises using graphs derived from *The New York Times'* "What's Going on in this Graph?" series (The Learning Network, 2019). A few questions suggested by *The New York Times* are used to warm up, and then the instructor introduces a think-pair-share activity (Kaddoura, 2013) created specifically for the public relations classroom. Students brainstorm different ways the data in each graph could influence strategic decision-making for different organizations, discuss ideas with a partner, and then share with the rest of the class.

Students engage in these short activities during several consecutive classes. In a second, related exercise, students complete a similar out-

of-class assignment for which they find their own graphs that could be used as part of environmental scanning. The exercises teach students to use commonly available data for strategic thinking as part of the environmental scanning process.

Student Learning Goals

These exercises have the following goals:
- To promote students' ability to interpret graphs as part of environmental scanning.
- To promote students' ability to brainstorm strategies based on quantitative data.

The Connection to Public Relations Theory and Practice

The practice of environmental scanning requires practitioners to seek information "about publics, about reactions of publics toward the organization, and about public opinion toward issues important to the organization" (Dozier, 1986, p. 4). Both formal and informal environmental scanning practices have long been considered important for public relations managers (Dozier, 1986), as well as for entry-level practitioners (Manley & Valin, 2017). Using graphs for environmental scanning practice is additionally helpful because public relations students need to be able to use quantitative data for strategic decision making (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). By using graphs, students can become comfortable with this format for gathering information as a part of environmental scanning.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

In anonymous surveys distributed online after the fourth day of the in-class activity, students were asked to describe recent interactions with quantitative data. Although the students were not specifically asked about the environmental scanning activities, eight out of 23 students alluded to these activities. Of these mentions, five were positive, two were somewhat negative in that they mentioned students' perceptions that such

activities were challenging, and one was neutral (see Appendix B). Finally, outcomes for the learning goals were assessed using the second out-of-class assignment; see Appendix C for examples of student work from the out-of-class activity used for assessment.

References

Commission on Public Relations Education (2018). *Fast forward: Foundations + future state. Educators + practitioners: The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 report on undergraduate education*. http://www.commissionpred.org/commission-reports/fast-forward-foundations-future-state-educators-practitioners/

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Appendix A
Assignment Instructions

For these assignments, all graphs were drawn from *The New York Times'* educational series "What's Going on in this Graph?" (The Learning Network, 2019). However, any graphs that can be used for environmental scanning may be appropriate.

For each in-class assignment, four slides were used. The text for the first three slides was adapted from the "What's Going on in this Graph?" original exercises. The text for the fourth slide was created by the instructor to adapt this exercise to the practice of public relations and prepare students to use data in periodicals for environmental scanning.

Part I: In-Class Exercise Slides
General format for lecture slides for the exercise (for each slide, the graph appears on the right and the text appears on the left):
Slide 1: What do you notice?*
Slide 2: What do you wonder?*
Slide 3: What's going on in this graph?*
Slide 4: Think - Pair - Share**
- What sort of businesses or organizations could make strategic decisions based on this information?
- What sorts of strategic decisions could they make based on this information?

* This text is taken from "What's Going on in this Graph?" exercises created by *The New York Times* (The Learning Network, 2019).
** Original content

Graphs and Graphics Used for Part I

Class 1

● A graph plotting the percentage of nutritionists versus the percentage of all Americans who think that various foods are healthy.

  ○ Graph taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/

  learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-oct-10-2017.html
  ○ Instructor's note: Instructors may also draw bar graphs on
    a whiteboard to explore data for individual foods as part of the
    class exercise (i.e., to compare how many nutritionists versus other
    Americans thought specific foods were healthy).

● A map of the United States demonstrating social connectedness via the likelihood of Facebook friendship between different counties.

  ○ Graph taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/03/

  learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-jan-9-2019.html
  ○Instructor's note: Because this graph is interactive, graphs for
    three counties were selected and screenshots were taken to share
    with the students: of their own county, the county of the nearest
    major metropolitan city, and Brooklyn, NY.

Class 2

● Miles spent cruising waiting for clients versus the number of trip requests per hour for a ridesharing service.

  ○ Graph taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/

  learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-april-17-2019.html
● The percentage of first-time mothers in each age group in 1980, with a second graph showing the same information for 2016.

○ Graphs taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/22/

learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-nov-28-2018.html
○ Instructor's note: Later in the semester, the graph of the
distribution for 2016 was used as an example of a bimodal
distribution and sparked a discussion about segmenting publics.

Class 3

● The relationship between increasing/decreasing fast food sales and
increasing/decreasing national wealth for various countries.

○ Graph taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/

learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-oct-17-2018.html

● The percentage of music sales for different genres of music for both
traditional sales and streaming only.

○ Graph taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/

learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-feb-6-2019.html

Class 4

● Two different graphs depict education among young adults in several
countries; the first examines whether young adults achieve higher levels of
education than their parents and the other depicts how many young adults
achieve levels of education beyond high school.

○Graphs taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/26/

learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-oct-2-2019.html

● Baseball players' salary compared to their skill (as measured by wins
above replacement).

○ Graph taken from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/

learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-april-17-2019.html
○Instructor's note: This graph provided an opportunity to discuss
how a lack of a relationship (correlation) can be interesting.

Furthermore, several students suggested that the cases may have been picked to prove a point and that the sample may not be representative, leading to a discussion of sampling methods.

Part II: Out-of-Class Activity

(For examples of student work, see Appendix C)

Instructions: Find a graph in a newspaper, magazine, or reputable blog. In one sentence, explain the main takeaway of the graph. Then, explain how the graph could be used for environmental scanning:

1. Identify one specific organization not mentioned in the article that could use this information.

2. Describe the strategic decision(s) the information could influence.

3. Include a link to the article that contains the graph.

Appendix B
Anonymous Survey Student Comments

Positive:

"The last time that I was involved with data interpretation was in class when we talking [sic] about what is going on in each graph. I feel confident in interpreting the basic ideas from graphs. For instance, I can usually tell what is going on and what the graph is measuring. However, I do not feel confident in interpreting statistics of graphs. Although I can determine what type of correlation the graph has based on the picture, I cannot give anyone information regarding the t-value or correlation coefficient. I am feeling a little behind in class for the statistics chapter. However, I am excited to learn more about interpreting numbers and graphs."

"I have gained more experience in interpreting graphs in PR Research. I

feel like it has helped my understanding of different types of data. I also monthly go over social media numbers for [name of university] Athletics' social media account and I try to place why we did well in social media or not so well. For example, if we have bad social numbers, it's typically because we aren't winning as much. I also try to distinguish trends in that data. I've noticed that people tend to comment/reply more if there is a bad game or the team isn't doing well, but more likely to retweet or like things if the team is doing well and winning."

"I have taken STATS 2000, which is my most recent use/knowledge of data interpretation. I also have learned a good bit so far in my Research class."

"In my PR Research class we analyze and discuss graphs. I enjoy it because it helps me get a better understanding of all the components needed to make a good graph."

"I have recently in class identified graphs and explained what the graphs mean. I feel confident when using numbers-based information and graphs. Numbers are easy to interpret and when they are displayed on a graph, it is easy to visualize."

Somewhat Negative:
"In class, we had to interpret a scatter plot without a title and that was a little difficult personally because I just felt like more information was needed."

"My most recent experience[s] with data interpretation have been in PR Research where we look at various different kinds of graphs and interpret what exactly is happening within the graph. We try to draw correlations

and causations from each graph and understand how the experimenters got to their date [sic] conclusions. I am still working on interpreting graphs, some are easier to understand than others. It is often times hard to draw correlations and figure out how the graph data came to be. I do not like using numbers-based information because I personally have never been good at interpreting numbers."

Neutral:

"In class, besides that, I do not remember the last time I had to interpret data on a graph."

Appendix C
Examples of Student Work for Second Student Activity
(All Examples are Used with Permission)

Name: Graham Cooper
Short paragraph identifying organization and decision:

The graph I have chosen breaks down the turn out [sic] of elections based on ethnicity and age between 2016 and 2018. This graph can be used by polling offices to try and figure out how to get more people to come out and vote, seeing as people always complain of low turn out [sic]. The polling centers could try and make choices of what groups of people they would want to target to come out or how to get younger people to come out, seeing as they are the lowest on this graph.

Link: https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-apps/imrs.php?src=https://

arc-anglerfish-washpost-prod-washpost.s3.amazonaws.com/public/

WOIC6QJEFBFFNKKBFKISD6GA34.jpg&w=1023

Name: Removed at student's request
Short paragraph identifying organization and decision:

The graph I used shows the trend of the 2019-2020 flu occurrences in the United States compared to that of recent years. The graph can be used by school systems as they prepare for the absences as well as spread awareness to their respective communities about preventative measures against the flu. Teachers can use this information for their self awareness, but also so that they can work days into their schedules to help students keep up.

Link: https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/07/health/northeast-flu/index.html

Name: Removed at student's request
Short paragraph identifying organization and decision:

This graph shows how the sales for a new app differ between Apple iOS and Android. The Apple app was released first and had 443 downloads within the first week. After a high demand for an Android version, the new adaption only had 150 downloads during the first week. It was clear that the Apple app was more successful in sales than the Android app. The article discusses how developers could use this information to figure out who they want their target public to be. If Apple is more successful with sales, then they should target Apple users. One organization that could use this information would be Apple and Android. Android can use this information to figure out why Apple is more successful in this area and change its marketing strategy. Apple can use this information and conduct further research to find what makes its iOS so successful and continue on that path.

Link: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewanspence/2014/04/29/this-graph-is-the-reason-developers-should-target-ios-over-android/#664452724b8b

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2020

From Acronym to Application:
PESO Comes to Life

Arien Rozelle, St. John Fisher College

Rationale

Students in PR Research and Planning are given a semester-long assignment that asks them to develop an integrated campaign for a real client. Throughout the course, students are introduced to a variety of PR models and theories, including the PESO model. This model, created in 2014 by Gini Dietrich, author of *Spin Sucks* and creator of the PESO model certification, is a typology of the four types of media: paid, earned, shared, and owned.

This in-class PESO activity–which simulates a strategy session that would take place in an agency setting–is conducted following an introductory lecture on the PESO model. This activity helps students identify different paid, earned, shared, and owned tactics, as well as conceptualize campaigns from an integrated perspective, moving PESO from acronym to application.

This PESO activity was inspired by Frederik Vincx, a designer and entrepreneur, who created a "PESO Kit" based off of Dietrich's model.

Student Learning Goals

- Enable students to understand and effectively apply strategic communication planning processes, problem-solving strategies, and operational techniques.
- Give students hands-on experience preparing real public relations campaigns for actual clients.
- Enhance students' ability to design, carry out, and analyze professional-quality projects using current communication and media technologies to address client needs related to public relations and/or reputation management.

Connection to Public Relations Practice

The PESO model was created for the purpose of communication planning. Since it was introduced in 2014, it has become widely adopted in practice. This activity helps students apply a model that is commonly used by practitioners.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

Below are selected testimonials from students, used with their permission:

"The PESO activity was a useful way to learn more about the PESO model. For me, learning visually is really important and helpful. Instead of just hearing about the PESO model, doing an interactive activity where I could physically organize types of coverage into a real PESO model helped me remember the differences and work through the specifics of the tool itself. It was also interesting to talk through the differences between the categories and how they all compare and contrast." – Lizzy B.

"The PESO activity helped me recognize what kind of tactics fit it to the different areas of media. It also helped me realize the importance of using a combination of paid, earned, shared, and owned media when running

an integrated public relations campaign. It was helpful to have a visual of all the different tactics to give us ideas of what to use in our campaign." – Colleen S.

"The activity was a great way to put all aspects of media down and be able to truly define what they all stood for. It allowed us to decipher which ones would be most beneficial to implement into our campaign based on our strategies and target audience. [It] was a great way of collaborating with our groups and brainstorming how each medium would fit into our campaign." – Kyle A.

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Appendix: From Acronym to Application: PESO Comes to Life Assignment

After students are given an introductory lecture about the development and details of the PESO model, they are then given the PESO Activity directions. Each agency (groups of 3-4 students) is provided with a poster-sized Venn diagram of the PESO model, along with a PESO menu, and corresponding physical PESO cards. They are asked to fill out
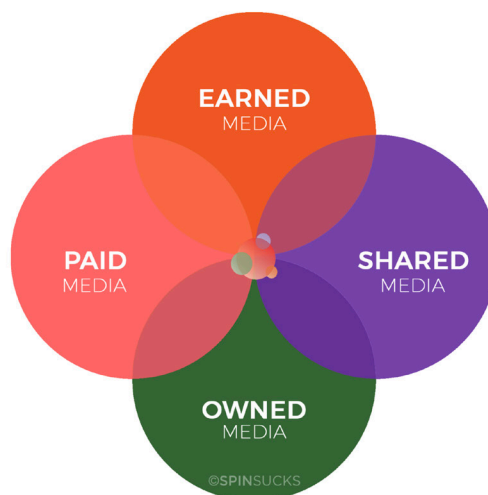
Graphic used with permission

the cards, identifying the tactics by media channel (paid, earned, shared, owned). They write the tactic on the card, then place the card on the Venn diagram. Additional directions below.

PESO Activity Directions

Step 1: Using the PESO menu, identify the tactics by media channel (paid, earned, shared, owned). Write the tactic on the corresponding PESO card until you have a card for every tactic.

Step 2: Arrange the PESO cards on the PESO Venn Diagram poster according to media type.

Step 3: Take a photo for your files!

Step 4: Review your results and discuss any new ideas with your agency. What tactics would make sense to use for your campaign?

Step 5: Remove the tactics you don't want to use for your campaign. What's left should be a visual representation of your campaign.

Step 6: Take a photo for your files!

Step 7: Agency discussion: is this an integrated campaign? How will this help you achieve your objective? Have you conducted sufficient research? How will you measure success? What did you learn?

Have fun!

PESO MENU
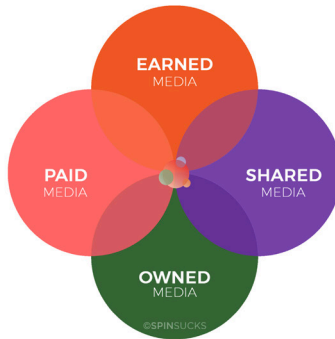
Sponsored Facebook posts	Print ad	Customer stories	Influencer outreach	Thought Leadership content	Employee stories	Curated event
Media pitching	Webinar	Sponsored Tweet	Email newsletter	Media tour	Native advertising	Brand ambassador
Blog post	Podcast	Instagram post	Slideshare or PPT presentation	Video (YouTube, Vimeo)	User generated content	Blogger event
Infographic	Brochure	E-book	Guest blog post	Sponsored LinkedIn "InMail"	Brand journalism	Charity tie-in

Paid Media
PESO Model

Earned Media
PESO Model

Shared Media
PESO Model

Owned Media
PESO Model
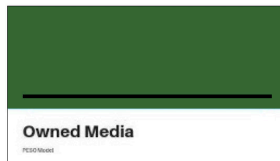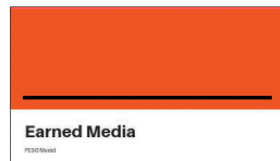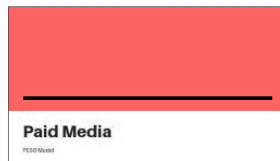
PESO menu. These examples of paid, earned, shared, and owned media give students a starting point for the assignment.

PESO cards, not to scale. They are about the size of a traditional business card. The cards are laminated and can be written on with dry erase marker. Students write each tactic from the PESO menu onto a corresponding PESO card. They then place the cards on the PESO Venn diagram poster.

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2020

Who's Out There? Using Google Analytics and Social Media Data to Research Online Publics

Melissa Adams, Appalachian State University

Rationale

This assignment was designed as an in-class workshop for public relations students, working in "agency teams," as part of their senior capstone campaigns course. For the first stage of their campaign proposal (also referred to as "book") development, students are required to research the online publics of the client organization. This work builds upon the information shared during the client briefing and helps students prepare for doing primary research of their own prior to campaign development. This assignment illustrates the value of digital research methods to understand who is already following the organization online and how they are engaging with them and their content. Finally, this assignment provides students with the opportunity to dig into analytic data and work as a team to analyze findings and develop profiles of key publics—much in the way one would in a professional agency setting.

To do this assignment, students work individually to complete the worksheet but sit together to discuss it as part of their previously formed

agency teams. This arrangement allows students who may have had some exposure to online audience research or Google Analytics to assist teammates who do not, and it provides the instructor more freedom to move around the room to help each team or answer questions as needed. Each student must have access to WiFi and a device with internet access capability to complete the assignment.

Student Learning Goals

This assignment will help students gain knowledge and cultivate skills in the following areas:

- Build research skills through the use of secondary data analysis (Google Analytics and social media accounts).
- Develop analytic acumen through the synthesis of multiple data points to develop profiles of organizational publics.
- Understand how to perform a basic social media audit for a client.
- Gain experience working with actual client organization data to develop a campaign addressing current business/organizational goals.

Connection to Public Relations Practice and Theory

Understanding how to access, analyze, and synthesize digital data to provide insights into client publics as part of campaign planning and evaluation is a necessary skill in digital public relations. This assignment mimics basic research activities I performed in the industry as part of campaign planning, which involved analyzing new client social outreach and messaging issues. The assignment may be used in any public relations or social media course focused on strategy and campaign planning. However, the client must provide access to its analytics account to the instructor, which is a minor process requiring less than a minute of their time. As Google Analytics is a free service for all but the very largest organizations, it is commonly used by nonprofits as well as small to medium-sized businesses to track their online engagements and campaigns. Therefore, most instructors should be able to identify clients

who use the platform. If for some reason instructor access is not possible, the assignment may easily be adapted to rely on Google Demo Account data.

In preparation for this assignment, students take part in an instructor-led tour of the client's Google Analytics account and data to familiarize themselves with the platform and standard reports. Special emphasis is placed on the overview reports for demographics and social media traffic. This tour takes place just after client discovery at the start of the course as we discuss the research stage of campaign planning and students read the "Formative Research" section of the assigned text (Smith, 2017).

The reading complements a short lesson on public relations research and supporting theory, including the situational theory of publics and the four levels of activation publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1997). The lesson notes that campaigns may target non-active publics and that through analysis of social media and analytics data, we can start to identify these levels of activity in the client's online audiences. This theoretical connection is extended by asking students "Who is missing?" in relation to the client's online publics. Thinking about inactive or latent publics as simply "missing" from the online data helps students understand that it is often just as important for practitioners to know who they are not reaching online, as it is to know about who they are, as those publics may be key to the organization (Hallahan, 2020). This critical consideration is incorporated into the assignment as a search for missing publics. Following this lesson and discussion, students are then ready to start their research, and the assignment serves as the official "kickoff" for their campaign project. Students access client analytics via a generic Gmail account set up by the instructor for this purpose and conduct searches to identify client social media accounts for observational analysis.

Evidence of Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes for this assignment are evidenced during the in-class workshop and in the students' written research chapter of their client campaign proposals. Additionally, students are asked to prepare and present a short research report to their classmates following data collection and analysis for the research phase of the project. The research presentations allow students an opportunity to observe, critique, ask questions, and provide peer feedback and ideas for improvements. Finally, evidence for the efficacy of this assignment has been indicated in course evaluations as students noted they appreciated the opportunity to develop "real world" experience to understand how Google Analytics and social media auditing may be used in public relations research. Evidence of both positive learning outcomes and the value of the assignment have been provided by former client organizations through anecdotal feedback at the end of the semester following student presentations and review of final campaign proposals. According to one former class client, student research produced as part of this exercise included some "eye-openers" that helped them move beyond assumptions about their online audiences.

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Appendix
Double-Sided Assignment Instructions & Worksheet

Assignment: Audience Analysis (Identifying online publics)

Research Objective: Develop basic descriptions of the organization's publics using Google Analytics and the client's social media accounts to research.

Time to complete: 45 minutes to 1 hour.

This assignment helps provide the foundation for the Publics Analysis in the Research section of your campaign proposal.

Assignment: For this assignment, you will analyze the client's publics who are visible on owned social media accounts. You will also use Google Analytics to look at traffic visiting their website. Note the demographics represented and try to identify (by predominance) the primary public and secondary public currently engaged with their online efforts. Be sure to answer all the questions noted in the instructions!

• Give each public a distinctive name that describes them demographically or by their interests (example: "Local enviro-loving millennials"). Record these on your worksheet. Also make notes of any observations about the behavior(s) of these publics that might inform your campaign (example: most engagement on the weekends). We will discuss our analysis during our next class. Be sure to turn in your worksheet when finished. (You may use the reverse of this worksheet or attach an additional sheet of paper if needed.)

- Note any "missing" publics (example: ages, genders, locations the client serves) that are not represented in current followers and traffic reports. (By "missing" publics, I'm referring to any groups not represented in the data we can access—but could be a target public that the organization desires to reach out to. Remember our discussion of active vs. inactive or unaware publics?)

Social Media Analysis Instructions:

1. Using the client website or Google search, identify **ALL** of the client's social media accounts. (In addition, once these are found, go ahead and follow them (put yourself in the stream of the client's social media communication!)

2. Record the metrics from their platforms (example: 22,002 Facebook followers).

3. Look at their social followers (user profiles)—who are they? Click on user profiles to see what you can see. Are they students? Employees? Where do they live? Try to discern some basic demos from these profiles, as well as where they live, interests, etc. Make notes on the back of this page.

4. Then, try to find the most popular topics and/or posts. What is the conversation about? What content has generated the most comments or interactions (shares, etc.)?

5. Examine at least **two months of social media data**. If possible, examine more (six months) to gain even more insight into their social audiences.

GA Analysis Instructions:

1. Log into Google Analytics (Gmail account - _____ @gmail. com /password = _____.) BE SURE TO LOG OUT OF YOUR GMAIL & ALL GOOGLE ACCOUNTS (including Drive) FIRST!

2. Look at **one year of data**. Also look at **demographics** and simple data like **time of day** the website receives the most traffic. (To change dates, click on the dates in the top right and a box will open.)

3. Where does most of their web traffic come from? (Go to "Acquisition" – then "Source/medium.")

4. How much of their traffic comes from social media and which platform drives the most visits? ("Social"– then "Networks.")

REMEMBER – the goal of this assignment is to gather information for your publics research. The more detail, the better! Let me know if you need help with Google Analytics or anything else.

WORKSHEET – Please record your metrics and audience description notes below.

Platform Metrics

Facebook: Instagram: Twitter: YouTube:

Other (list below):

Primary (Online) Public   Name: _____
Description (include demographics, interests, etc.)

Secondary (Online) Public   Name: _____
Description (include demographics, etc.)

Missing publics?
Name: _____
Description (include demographics, etc.)

Name: _____
Description (include demographics, etc.)

General observations:

Evaluating Organizational Culture and Courageous Communication

Melanie Formentin, Towson University

Rationale

Corporate Communication Management is a capstone-style course designed to introduce students to practical theories that inform best corporate communication practices. This course serves seniors and advanced juniors who have already taken courses in research methods and public relations writing. As such, this final project is designed to give students an opportunity to apply theory in a multi-layered experience related to understanding the importance and influence of organizational culture. Students follow Lyon's (2017) framework for courageous communication to evaluate the culture in organizations of their choice.

The goal of this project is to scaffold a learning experience that allows students to build skills related to networking, researching, interviewing, and presenting. A key component also involves applying theory in practice. Students work in pairs to complete this project— encouraging collaboration—and practice networking skills to gain permission to research an organization of their choice. Then, students

interview employees to understand perceptions of organizational culture. The project encourages students to act as consultants, analyzing employee perceptions within a theoretical context, then offering recommendations regarding the quality of the organization's communication culture. Ultimately, students present the results in a short presentation. This consultancy-style approach gives students an opportunity to work directly with client organizations to concisely evaluate and communicate theory-based findings. Ideally, projects may be shared with organizations, and students can reflect gained skills in the job application process.

Student Learning Goals

Because this is a final project that students begin in the first third of the semester, there are multiple student learning goals. Ideally, the project serves as a summative assessment (Taras, 2005) of skills developed and theories learned during the semester. Upon completing this project, students should be able to accomplish the following goals:

- Apply networking and professional communication skills to gain organizational access.
- Build practical research skills by conducting and transcribing interviews and completing qualitative analysis.
- Apply theory (courageous communication) to understand qualities of organizational culture (Lyon, 2017).
- Refine presentation skills and develop professional presentation tactics.
- Gain consultant-style experience by combining secondary and primary research to evaluate and provide recommendations regarding strengths and weaknesses in an organization's culture.

Connection to Public Relations Theory and Practice

This project is designed to give students a variety of practical experiences while teaching them to identify and define theoretical concepts in practice. Using Argenti's (2016) *Corporate Communication*,

students learn the importance and influence of organizational missions and values and identity, image, and reputation. Students are challenged to combine an understanding of corporate functions (e.g., leadership, internal v. external communication) with a theoretical framework of courageous communication (Lyon, 2017). Specifically, courageous communication proposes that the strength of an organization's communication culture can be evaluated based on four dimensions including: controlling and collaborative; top-down and upward; secretive and transparent; and impersonal and engaging communication.

Overall, each step of the project gives students practice with commonly used corporate communication practices that are introduced through individual lessons built into the course. For example, students apply networking and professional communication practices to secure their organization and recruit employee participants. Because networking is considered "an essential skill for the PR communicator's tool kit" (Brownell, 2014, para. 1), a guest speaker from the university career center is invited to guide a lesson about LinkedIn and networking skills, which are then applied by students as they begin the project. While some students are comfortable with networking, others are more closely coached through the process. For example, they are encouraged to connect with organizations they are familiar with (such as through work or family members) or organizations they are interested in learning more about. Support is provided through the review and editing of pitch emails, development of interview schedules, and guidance related to follow-up calls and shifting gears if a client relationship falls through.

Next, students learn common tactical skills by conducting interviews. The process of talking with employees and transcribing interviews gives students experience that supports traditional expectations for creating content while also strengthening opportunities to make content more accessible (Miller, 2019). Next, by interpreting the interviews and

pulling exemplar quotes, students apply research methods and strategic decision-making skills. Finally, the short presentation format is designed to provide practice with concise business presentations (Brandon, 2015). During the semester, assignments have limited word counts and presentation times to help students practice clarity and conciseness. Ultimately, the final presentation encourages students to focus on creating engaging presentations that highlight key takeaways most appropriate for corporate settings.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

Although initially skeptical of this final project, students ultimately express a true appreciation for having completed this assignment. Many students use their internship or job sites to complete this research. Not only do they find the results of their study illuminating, but also in some cases students share findings with managers and supervisors. Ultimately, they appreciate the new perspectives the assignment brings to their understanding of organizational culture and its impact on both external and internal relationship-building and relationship-management practices. Students also acknowledge that the presentation structure is challenging, but it helps them think strategically about communicating key findings.

A review of student work shows that through feedback and editing, students produce projects that pack a lot of information into concise packages. They clearly differentiate between dimensions of courageous communication, even using theoretical language when contributing to class discussions. More practically, although some students initially question the usefulness of conducting and transcribing interviews, they generally find the process beneficial. One former student sent an email to "apologize" for thinking the transcriptions weren't "worth the effort." Having to transcribe multiple interviews at work to create accessible multimedia content, the student expressed: "I appreciate that you push your students to learn what's common/expected in the industry."

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Appendix
Corporate Communication Management
Guidelines: Final Project, Organizational Culture

Project Proposal: Due XXXX
Final Project and Presentation: Due before final exam period XXXXX

Assignment

This semester you are expected to understand and apply practical
corporate communication theories to contemporary practices. This
includes analyzing the role of communication in corporate culture;
understanding organizational channels of communication; assessing group

and individual behaviors and their impact on communication strategies; and evaluating the role of organizational leadership.

Working in pairs, you will use background research and interviews to examine the organizational culture of a company of your choice. To do this, you will conduct interviews with members of your organization to evaluate the quality and characteristics of that organization's culture. Placing your findings in the context of courageous communication strategies, you will produce a comprehensive report aimed at evaluating the degree to which your organization practices courageous communication. Your evaluation and recommendations will be based on a combination of primary and secondary research. This project will include a final presentation of your findings and evaluations. This project is designed to give you an opportunity to critically evaluate an existing organization's corporate culture.

Organizational Proposal
The first step of your project includes the organizational proposal. In this proposal you should outline which organization you would like to examine, providing a thorough organizational background and information confirming your ability to use this organization as an example. You should also provide drafts of the data collection tools needed to conduct your research.

How you choose and find an organization is up to you! You might evaluate an organization you're familiar with or you might choose to reach out to an organization you're interested in learning more about. Regardless of how you choose your organization, you will need to build a project proposal before you can begin conducting primary research. This proposal should include the following components:

1. **A thorough background about the organization**. You should highlight information including a historical overview of the organization and what it does. This should include presenting and evaluating information about the organization such as its mission and values. To the best of your ability, you should begin evaluating the organization's identity, image, and reputation.

2. To the best of your ability, **identify and describe the corporate communication structure that appears to be in place** (e.g., is there a Chief Communications Officer, specific communication departments, etc.). Explain if this information is not available at this point of the project; however, you should have this information before the project is complete.

3. Provide information about your **primary point of contact**. Begin by establishing how you connected with this person. Next, include contact information (email and phone number) for this individual, then provide a brief bio about their experience and what they do for the organization.

4. Finally, **provide the initial draft of your recruitment email and interview schedule**. You should compose a professional email that explains the scope of the project for potential interviewees. Include information such as how long the interview will take and that it will be recorded and transcribed, but information will remain confidential. For the interview schedule, provide an overview of the script you will use to open and conclude the interview. Also include the list of open-ended questions you plan to ask interviewees.

Interviews

The core findings of your project will be based on interviews with at least 10 employees at the organization. Through these interviews, you will learn about the perceptions of the organization's corporate culture.

Interviews should be designed to learn about what the company does and the company's communication structure. You should also ask questions about how communication occurs. Tapping into your knowledge about the four dimensions of corporate communication, you will want to explore the degree to which the organization exhibits the four dimensions presented by Lyon. Remember, however, that questions should broadly reflect the topics of interest—you can't presume that interviewees will use the same jargon presented in our textbook. Make sure the instructor has reviewed your interview schedules prior to conducting any interviews.

Ideally, interviews should take place in person and be recorded:
- If additional arrangements need to be made, you should be able to explain why.
- Remember that prior to starting the interview you must confirm that you have permission to record.

After interviews are completed, you will need to transcribe and analyze them to better build your evaluation of the company.

Note: Each person must conduct and record five interviews. Part of being a professional means learning how to connect (network!) with people you may not know. Additionally, you might be surprised with the number of corporate communication practices that rely on the ability to interview people. This often involves recording and transcribing interviews and identifying the most impactful comments made by interviewees. Interview

recordings should be uploaded to your group's file share on the course site to confirm that each team member participated in the interviewing process. Failure to participate in the interview process will result in a minimum of a letter grade deduction on the final project.

Final Organizational Culture Project
Your organizational culture project should be a comprehensive report that describes the quality and characteristics of the culture at the organization of your choice. For this project, you should emphasize the four dimensions of courageous organizational communication outlined in the Lyon text (aka: all the stuff you and your classmates presented this semester). This includes evaluating how the dimensions of controlling and collaborative; top-down and upward; secretive and transparent; and impersonal and engaging communication emerge in your chosen organization.

To complete this project, you should build out your organizational background (edit what you presented in the proposal), adding information you have learned through additional secondary research and interviews with organizational employees. Then, using outside academic and professional resources, you should make a case for the degree to which your organization exhibits courageous communication strategies. You should critically evaluate the organization's culture, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses you've identified. If the organization is doing work that is particularly courageous, explain why and how. If there appear to be weaknesses in the organization's communication culture, identify solutions that could help strengthen their communication function.

Format

The final submission of this paper should use 12-point, Times New Roman font. The paper must be double-spaced and should use APA format guidelines for headings, tables, in-text citations, references, etc.

• This paper should include a title page and reference list. No abstract is required. Appendices containing data collection materials should be included.

• Separately, in your group's File Exchange, you should upload all recorded interviews and the accompanying transcripts.

• **Note:** Only one submission of the final project is needed per group. Please upload ONLY Word document files.

Final Presentation

A major component of the final project will be your team presentation. During the final exam period, your team will present a brief overview of your project's findings. Presentations should highlight the degree to which your organization exhibits courageous communication. However, this will be a very short presentation—for this, you will be challenged to provide a high-level overview of your findings in a clear, concise manner. Think of this as a brief presentation to a busy member of the C-Suite. A few notes about the presentation:

1. Presentations should be between 5-7 minutes long.

2. The presentation should cover the following material:
   • Give a brief overview of the organization.
   • Evaluate how your organization performs on each dimension of courageous communication.

- Provide a concise evaluation of whether your organization uses good, courageous communication practices. You should either illustrate how your organization serves as an example of good corporate communication practices or discuss solutions to strengthen its existing practices.
- Share a brief conclusion, wrapping up the presentation.

3. Presenters should have equal speaking time. The presentation should appear practiced.

4. Upload your presentation deck to the course website prior to our final exam meeting time. For this presentation, you should use PowerPoint or similar presentation software to supplement your presentation.

Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto

Reviewed by
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The curveballs thrown to us in 2020 have highlighted inequities in our culture and our need to harness adaptable pedagogy. The former is nothing new. The Working Group on Diversity & Inclusion for the Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) found that the demographics of the academy do not match the diversity found in PR practitioner communities. The working group made recommendations regarding forming a more diverse pipeline for PR higher education but also acknowledged that work must be done in the classroom to provide a more equitable educational experience. How, then, are we to juggle both the call for equality in both our culture and classrooms alongside the need to reformat our courses to shift modalities at a moment's notice? Many answers and suggestions can be found in Kevin M. Gannon's *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto*.

Gannon's (2020) recommendation for grappling with these crises is to reject the act of teaching as a means for information transfer and embrace it as a more holistically transformative process. He urges the reader to reject the all-too-common "jaded detachment" (p. 3) found within the academic community and embrace the titular sense of "radical hope" that compels us to strive to create better futures for our students.

At first, this process doesn't seem particularly novel, since academe has long paid lip service to the liberal arts education as an educational process dedicated to educating the "whole person." What is truly novel—and appropriate for our present circumstances—is Gannon's insistence that we actually embody this notion in the classroom.

The property of "radical hope" is explained by Gannon (2020) in his introduction:

> The very acts of trying to teach well, of adopting a critically reflective practice to improve our teaching and our students' learning, are *radical*, in that word's literal sense: they are endeavors aimed at fundamental, root-level transformation. And they are acts of *hope* because they imagine that process of transformation as one in which a better future takes shape out of our students' critical refusal to abide by the limitations of the present. (p. 5)

At the core of the "radical hope" paradigm of teaching is the concept of *praxis*. Gannon leans upon Paulo Freire's conceptualization of praxis as a blend of reflection and action. We should be continuously reflecting on our teaching practices and using our observations to update how we engage with our students. Driving home the point that "treating all students *equally* was not the same thing as treating all students *equitably*" (p. 30), Gannon (2020) pushes faculty to take a more active role in education, one in which the educator abandons the false idol of neutrality—"Neutrality is a luxury of the comfortable," he says (p. 21)—and intentionally prioritizes compassion and inclusion.

Dr. Gannon isn't new to these concepts. As a professor of history and director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa, Gannon has long been sounding a clarion call for an increased critical and inclusive pedagogy, making him distinctly suited to address the needs of higher education in

the current moment. He has traveled to campuses across North America as a consultant and speaker and was interviewed as part of Ava DuVernay's Oscar-nominated documentary *13th*. As COVID-19 forces us to reconsider long-entrenched teaching paradigms, and nationwide protests against systemic racism drive us to seek justice in how we serve our students, the principles Gannon lays out in his manifesto can play a big role in guiding us to these objectives.

Structure and Organization

Gannon (2020) starts his work by listing the woes of higher education, such as suffering from financial struggles that are "the fruit of a neoliberal, market-driven ideology with little room for the notion of a public good" (p. 1). While he provides an array of examples to support this characterization, any reader who remains skeptical need only examine the scattershot "plans" to reopen campuses during a pandemic, the product of an optimism that can only come from willful ignorance.

After his introduction, Gannon devotes 10 chapters to exploring 10 specific educational principles or concepts that can be upheld as either aspirational beliefs or examples of a status quo begging to be torn down. The first chapter, "Classrooms of Death," modernizes a phrase coined by N. F. S. Grundtvig to describe schools that offered an education irrelevant to the lives of most students. How then, Gannon asks, are we supposed to ensure that the education we offer contributes to the "life" of society, turning out individuals with not only knowledge but also a sense of civic responsibility and efficacy? Using the August 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville as a key example, Gannon charges educators to assert the incompatibility between white nationalism and the successful navigation of the academic sphere of higher education. Knowledge creation, Gannon argues, is insufficient for valuable higher education. The subsequent processes of analyzing and internalizing learned knowledge must also be guided by the professor. As Gannon (2020) states, "simply

introducing knowledge into the public sphere and then abdicating any role in what happens to it afterward is at best highly problematic; at worst, it's wildly irresponsible" (p. 16). This emphasis on actively investing in both the student and the learning process is also manifest in the next chapter, which focuses on communication of expectations in everyday teaching practice. It is in this chapter that Gannon begins to craft his argument that the idealized form of the professor as a wise orator must give way to a more compassionate figure. Proudly exclaiming that a course requires a certain caliber of student— especially in blind devotion to the idea of "rigor"—does not represent an earnest investment in students' futures.

In each subsequent chapter, Gannon continues the case for actively sowing the seeds for transformative learning. He takes special care to urge the reader toward inclusivity by actively challenging them to consider how even widely accepted teaching practices may exclude students with disabilities or those who come from nontraditional backgrounds. The text also challenges the reader to avoid some of the cultural pitfalls found in teaching higher education. For example, while venting about students in closed-door meetings may have a cathartic benefit, it can spiral out of control and cement the notion of an adversarial relationship between professor and student. On that note, Gannon points out the current trend of faculty members subtweeting their students by pointing out their more absurd behavior in a virtual public space. While it may promote a foxhole camaraderie amongst educators, what does it communicate to the students who stumble across these objects of ridicule—especially the students whose work or confusion is being displayed for all to mock?

The areas ripe for praxis are numerous, and Gannon identifies them in the elements of our profession both technical and traditional. By pointing out how the digital platforms we use may isolate certain students, he encourages faculty to develop curricula that utilize the platforms to their full extent, offering different types of learning experiences for

students to utilize and minimizing technical issues that may exclude certain students. To accomplish this, he advocates implementing universal design for learning (UDL) principles. Additionally, Gannon devotes an entire chapter to the syllabus and how it communicates a host of expectations to students beyond its text. The current emphasis on syllabus-as-legal-document is counterproductive, he insists, advocating for the "promising syllabus" approach pioneered by Ken Bain instead. "The promising syllabus has student learning, not instructors or institutions, firmly at its center. This is a subtle, seemingly simple shift, but one that has extraordinary consequences" (Gannon, 2020, p. 99).

Gannon's final chapter focuses on three specific words that can dramatically change the classroom: "I don't know." Pointing out the pandemic of imposter syndrome found in the academy, he argues that admitting the lack of knowledge on a particular subject fosters a more collaborative relationship between professors and students, demonstrating that not knowing an answer—and subsequently finding it—is healthier than pretending to know it all along. Removing the academic pomp and circumstance and sense of detachment encourages us to wield our pedagogy as a gift, not a weapon.

Contribution to Higher Education, Especially in Public Relations

Written in a tone that is startlingly succinct, yet resonant with raw emotion, Gannon's points are amplified by his tone of strong, even forceful, optimism. He takes care to encourage the reader as he goes through his points, chipping away at the calcified resentment and despair that is all too common among educators. Even when challenging the reader, Gannon's focus on edification and a mutual goal with the reader discourages any defensive objections from taking hold.

The work is further aided by the timing of its release. Shortly after publication, COVID-19 upended everything we thought we could expect from a semester. Suddenly, many of us were faced with a

teaching modality we had never planned to use. All of us had to make decisions regarding the balance of rigor and compassion in the midst of circumstances we hadn't anticipated. Shortly after that, the nationwide protests against systemic racism elevated a conversation long overdue in every discipline, including and especially public relations. Gannon's work provides elements of a blueprint that can help us avoid simply using the present events as case study fodder and move toward an educational paradigm pointed at intentional inclusivity. It has certainly encouraged this reviewer to abandon the false pretense of "neutrality" when teaching PR and work to form students who will be most likely to make positive, significant contributions to our world's social health.

The impact of Gannon's points are assisted by the work's length. He describes it as a "manifesto," and the term proves accurate, as *Radical Hope* is a short work that many could complete in a day. The book avoids wasting pages working up to a point too slowly. Instead, the reader is welcomed with rapidly developing arguments that build on the core calls for inclusivity, compassion, and praxis in pedagogy.

The brevity is a double-edged sword, however, as Gannon can move on to the next point while leaving the reader wanting to explore the previous argument in more detail. This is most apparent when discussing UDL, as Gannon only provides one concrete example of a UDL practice: formatting material to be easily parsed by screen readers for the blind. While a fantastic example of something readily accomplishable before the next semester, this reviewer was left curious for more examples, even as far as to pause reading the book to go seek out more avenues for UDL. Even brief mentions of techniques to accommodate spectrums other than those involving people with disabilities would have strengthened the argument. For example, Gannon could have explored UDL techniques meant to accommodate students without reliable access to the internet, which would have been remarkably prescient given the COVID-19

pandemic.

There is no shortage of prescriptive works aiming to improve either the performance or lives of those serving in higher education, making it all the more rare when a book stands out to the degree that *Radical Hope* does. The book could not have been released at a more ideal time, making it required reading for those of us struggling to figure out how to adjust and balance our work this fall. At times both challenging and affirming, *Radical Hope* provides a clear path to helping us tackle the present and adapt to the future.

References

Commission on Public Relations Education. (2018). *Fast forward: Foundations + future state. Educators + practitioners: The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 report on undergraduate education.* http://www.commissionpred.org/commission-reports/fast-forward-foundations-future-state-educators-practitioners/

Social Media for Strategic Communication: Creative Strategies and Research-Based Applications

Reviewed by
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In the last 15 years, a veritable explosion of social media channels has entered and forever changed the practice of public relations. What does this mean for public relations educators? Well, if you are committed to preparing students for careers, it likely means you are constantly evolving your pedagogical approach. While our ethos of ethically building mutually beneficial relationships remains foundational, preparing students for the digital landscape means that we, as professors, need to consider how this fast-paced environment impacts students' ability to think strategically and effectively produce content. In fact, the most recent Commission on Public Relations Education report (2018) indicates that employers are most concerned about what entry-level practitioners can produce and do, including writing for the web. Further, the report indicates that social media is the most highly rated technology-curriculum topic by practitioners.

In the book, *Social Media for Strategic Communication: Creative Strategies and Research-Based Applications*, Karen Freberg (2018), associate professor of strategic communication at the University of

Louisville, takes a comprehensive approach to preparing students to produce social media content and enabling them to compete for industry positions with a social media focus. In the book, Freberg draws both on research and practitioner insights from various disciplines. Focusing on strategies, behaviors, and mindset, the text is both a guidebook and resource for professors, practitioners, and students alike. Based on her own research, experience teaching social media, and significant professional connections, Freberg's text takes the guesswork out of how to approach and teach strategic social media.

Book's Composition and Organization

The book is thoughtfully organized into three parts, first focusing on foundations, followed by strategies, and concluding with careers. In the first part, Freberg frames strategic use of social media as both an art and science, then takes the reader through the ethical and legal considerations of communicating on social media. At the conclusion of part one, the text reinforces the importance of research by reviewing social media monitoring, listening, and analysis. This framework is then built on throughout the remainder of the text.

In part two, the focus is on strategy-based campaign planning concepts ranging from audience segmentation and writing for social media to budgeting, calendaring, and evaluation. Importantly, Freberg does not propose that strategic planning for social media is different from public relations. Instead, she expands on foundational concepts taught across the core of the public relations curriculum. For instance, the first chapter of part two of the text takes readers through the strategic campaign planning process using language that should be familiar to any public relations student. The following chapters dive more deeply into each step and expand on the topics in a social media-specific context, including areas such as influencers, creators, managing and curating content, and common writing mistakes on social media.

In part three, the focus is on ensuring the reader understands the pervasive role of social media by covering specializations as diverse as entertainment, crisis communication, sports, nonprofit, health care and international communication. Concluding in this way allows the reader to consider how all they have learned could be applied in different disciplines and myriad interests.

Book's Strengths and Weaknesses

Rather than focusing on platform features and trends, this text offers a clear framework for developing a strategic mindset, which keeps the content from getting old. For example, each chapter of the text begins with a "Humans of Social Media" feature that introduces the reader to thought leaders in the field. Rather than aging like so many social media case studies, these interviews provide industry-relevant insights that frame the chapter content.

The utility of the text is further strengthened by the use of tables and figures that break up what could be dense reading and provide quick reference to key concepts. For example, tables that provide a comparative glimpse at performance metrics reinforce the importance of advanced and behavioral metrics as compared to basic metrics (e.g., likes, followers). Other tables offer examples for students to reflect on (e.g., sample vision statements, sample content calendars), while others offer templates for their own efforts (e.g., social media audits, content templates). Further, the thought questions and exercises that conclude each chapter offer ready-made discussion prompts and assignments that apply chapter learning outcomes to real-world scenarios.

One critique of the text could be the lack of emphasis on paid social media strategies. There are presently a few pages dedicated to the topic in the budgeting section of Chapter 10. Additional passing reference to paid content is included in relevant chapters. However, I would argue that with algorithms limiting organic reach, this topic is

central to a strategic social media mindset. To overcome this limitation in my own courses, I have supplemented with digital certifications and simulation-type activities that provide a more well-rounded view. A more comprehensive discussion of the role of paid social media seems an appropriate addition for future editions of the text.

While the book provides an in-depth review of important topics like ethics and legal fundamentals, a second area for improvement would be an enhanced focus on diversity-related content. For instance, including accessibility guides and multicultural perspectives would be valuable in the sections focused on understanding the target audience. Additionally, examples that highlight model approaches to equity-focused social media communication would help students understand best practices. Further, lifting up diverse voices in the "Humans of Social Media" profiles and resources would also improve students' understanding of strategic social media careers.

Who Would Benefit from Reading this Book?

When considering textbooks for a strategic social media course at my institution, I compiled a comprehensive list and narrowed the options to four possible texts. I then gathered a group of a dozen students from varying classes across the public relations curriculum and allowed them to review and offer their thoughts on the options. The students unanimously chose the Freberg text because of the low cost and ease of reading, as well as features like interviews with industry insiders, tables that synthesize key topics, and an abundance of resources. I shared their sentiment and the text has now been used with high praise from students and instructors alike for three semesters.

In addition to a foundational text for social media courses, the practical insights and research-based approach of this book makes it appropriate for instructors looking to supplement their other public relations courses or activities. For example, I have referenced chapters

related to monitoring, listening, and analysis in a research methods course. The book's sections on strategic planning, budgeting, evaluation, and calendaring provide an additional resource for students developing campaign plans, such as those for the capstone. The content related to writing offers supplemental insights for a public relations writing course or sections of a broader writing course seeking more specialized modules. This text is also useful outside of the traditional classroom. For example, the professional branding content has proved useful as part of programming for the Public Relations Student Society of America at my college. Also, I have encouraged graduates starting careers with a social media role to purchase the text as a reference guide.

Overall, this text has been well worth the financial investment for me, my students, and my graduates.

References

Commission on Public Relations Education. (2018). *Fast forward: Foundations + future state. Educators + practitioners: The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 report on undergraduate education*. http://www.commissionpred.org/ commission-reports/fast-forward-foundations-future-state- educators-practitioners/

Lifescale: How to Live a More Creative, Productive, and Happy Life

Reviewed by
Amanda J. Weed, Kennesaw State University

Author: Brian Solis
Wiley, 2019
ISBN: 9781119535867

As one of the most prominent thought leaders in digital and emerging technologies, Brian Solis is well-known for his evangelical advocacy for the integration of digital media strategies into innovative business practices. In *Lifescale: How to Live a More Creative, Productive, and Happy Life*, Solis looks at digital media through a more pragmatic lens to examine how those technologies can have unforeseen impacts on our daily lives.

As digital media becomes interwoven into our media consumption habits, it dramatically impacts our productivity and our relationships. We become chained in a perpetual cycle of responding to app notifications, emails, social media posts, and text messages. When we look at the clock, we can often be left scratching our heads, wondering where the day went. Solis addresses research-based insights into the "addictive" nature of digital technology and empowers readers to rethink their media consumption to improve productivity and spark creative potential.

Organization of the Book

Solis presents the chapters of this 304-page book as a journey of self-discovery, complete with a visual roadmap at the very beginning of the book. He begins this exploratory journey by identifying how digital

media is intertwined into our daily activities, why we are motivated to engage so frequently with digital media, and how digital is designed to keep us "hooked." According to Solis (2019):

> Every day we do our best to navigate life and keep up with our personal and professional responsibilities, but at the end of each day, we're still fighting to complete our self-imposed to-do lists, both at work and at home, a hamster-wheel process that detracts from our longer-term goals and dreams. (p. 14)

As the chapters unfold, Solis continues the journey by leading the reader through various paths of self-discovery (or re-discovery) that focus on personal values, goals, and childlike dreams. What does that have to do with digital media, you might ask? The underlying thread throughout this book is that we often conform to the expectations of digital media (especially social media) as our internal measuring stick to determine our values and behaviors, rather than heeding our inner voice.

In the final chapters, Solis shares how disconnection from our inner purpose can be the Achilles heel that allows distractions, multitasking, and nagging self-doubt to derail us from our goals. He reminds the reader to be mindful and live in the moment to understand we are part of something larger and to reflect on what we want our contribution to be in this world.

He describes the concept of the "pillars of purpose," how those pillars should be the compass to the roadmap of self-discovery, and how to tap into those pillars to focus personal energy in positive directions. Solis (2019) explains:

> Harder than making change is recognizing and accepting our need for it. Doing so requires us to acknowledge that so much of what we've been doing has gotten us off course. Deep down, we know that there are ways in which we have not been helping ourselves, or have even been shooting ourselves in the foot. (p. 178)

Strengths and Weaknesses

Solis' writing style is conversational and welcoming. Each chapter feels like having coffee with a cherished mentor. Solis shares self-discovery exercises and unique tools to guide the reader through self-awareness and maximizing creative productivity. *Lifescale* is full of examples that fulfill the three Rs: recognizable, relatable, and relevant. From personal anecdotes to stories of well-known corporate leaders, this book places advice and tips into a real-world context. That strength doubles as a weakness, though. While there are many examples and anecdotes about well-known public figures, there is a lack of representation of the average person. By blending examples of public figures and everyday people (especially young professionals), it might increase the sense that the advice imparted by Solis is accessible to everyone, not just those who have already achieved success in their field.

Contributions of this Book

While not a textbook in the traditional sense, *Lifescale* is an excellent addition to the public relations curriculum because it encourages the reader to "know thyself." This is one of the most important lessons students need to be successful in school, in their careers, and in life.

This book would make an excellent addition to the public relations curriculum in an introductory course, a portfolio or capstone class, or even as a recommended read for PRSSA chapters. The advice, exercises, and tools shared by Solis will enhance students' ability to create a personal brand, effectively balance the demands of student life, and successfully navigate their first industry jobs.