

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2020

Diverse Voices in the History of Public Relations

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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

- 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/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/report6-full.pdf>
- Public Relations Society of America (n.d.). *Diversity & Inclusion*. Retrieved Feb 8, 2020, from <https://www.prsa.org/about/diversity-inclusion>
- Spector, S., & Spector, B. (Eds.). (2018). *Diverse voices: Profiles in leadership*. PRMuseum Press.

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	<p>Middle paragraphs apply information learned from research sources and course content by answering the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.