Journal of Public Relations Education

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Volume 6, Issue 3, Fall 2020
Special Issue on Public Relations Ethics Education
A publication of the Public Relations Division of AEJMC
ISSN 2573-1742

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ISSN 2573-1742

Journal of Public Relations Education
Editorial Staff

Note from the Editor-in-Chief:
We are pleased to publish this special issue focused on public relations ethics education in partnership with the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication with Dr. Denise Bortree serving as guest editor.

Journal of Public Relations Education
Editorial Review Board

Journal of
Public Relations Education
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Table of Contents

Letter from the Guest Editor

Research Articles

Teaching Briefs

Book Reviews

Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No.3, 1-3

Letter from the Special Issue Editor

December 14, 2020

In October 2019, the Commission on Public Relations Education issued its *Ethics Education Report* with suggestions for creating a required ethics course as recommended in the Commission's earlier report *Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State: Educators and Practitioners*. The *Ethics Education Report* offered a new course proposal, student learning outcomes, course content, essential skills/knowledge/abilities, online resources, and sample syllabi. What it lacked were practical assignments and real-world application that might be useful for faculty who wish to build a new ethics course. This special issue of the *Journal of Public Relations Education* was created to help fill the gap and strengthen the arguments for the need for public relations ethics education internationally. The issue includes research articles examining the current state of ethics education and teaching briefs sharing practical ideas that can be adopted into curriculum, as well as a book review of a recently published ethics textbook. I hope you find the material here useful as you consider how you might develop a new course or strengthen the current ethics curriculum in your program.

The issue opens with an article "Accreditation, Curriculum, and Ethics: Exploring the Public Relations Education Landscape*"* by Del Rosso, Haught, and Marks Malone that examines programs certified by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) for the Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) and also accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). Not surprisingly, it finds that few were requiring ethics courses at the time of data collection, and

this benchmarking study will help us see how the addition of a new requirement for an ethics course will change the curriculum of these programs and others.

The second article, "Public Relations Education in Singapore: Educating the Next Generation of Practitioners on Ethics" by Woon and Pang, examines the current state of ethics education in an international setting, comparing foreign and local programs in Singapore. It offers insights into the ways that programs are preparing future practitioners in the region.

The three teaching briefs in this issue offer ethics assignments that can be easily adopted into the public relations classroom. In their article "PR Ethics Literacy: Identifying Moral and Ethical Values Through Purposeful Ethical Education," authors Ward, Luttrell, and Wallace detail the application of a case study to teach ethical decision-making. They offer a model for decision-making and a step-by-step process to help students think through the issues and reflect on their decisions.

Along a similar line, Kim shares assignments and rubrics for three activities used in a graduate program in Australia to strengthen students' ethical decision-making skills. In the article "Finding a Linkage Between Becoming an Ethical Practitioner and Making an Organization Socially Responsible," the author discusses the benefits and challenges of the assignments in helping students improve their ethics abilities.

The special issue teaching briefs wrap up with a recommendation for a fun activity in Rozelle's "PR Ethics: Choose Your Own Adventure" adopting the concept from children's books that allow readers to choose their next steps and see the resulting consequences.

Thank you to current (and outgoing) editor Emily Kinsky who worked patiently with me over the summer and through the fall as I, and a number of the article authors, battled COVID-19 related challenges. A special thank you to the reviewers who quickly accepted my invitations

to review and offered useful feedback for authors to help improve the relevance of the work here. It has been an unusual year, and I am pleased that we were able to keep the conversation about ethics education moving forward despite the many global challenges we faced this year. I hope you enjoy the special issue.

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No.3, 4-28

Accreditation, Curriculum, and Ethics: Exploring the Public Relations Education Landscape

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The Commission on Public Relations Education issued a report in 2018 recommending that public relations ethics be a required course, in addition to the incorporation of ethics into all public relations courses. To understand the implications of this recommendation, this study explores the nature of public relations ethics education in 15 PR programs accredited by Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications and certified by Public Relations Society of America via the Certification in Education for Public Relations program. Through an analysis of 2020 academic catalogs, findings suggest that although programs have general ethics courses (e.g., media ethics or law and ethics), few programs offer—and fewer require—public relations ethics courses. The research concludes that in conjunction with previous research on ethics in the classroom, programs implement an experiential learning approach to ethics instruction.

Keywords: ethics, curriculum, accreditation

Editorial Record: Special issue deadline June 15, 2020. Revision submitted October 7, 2020. First published online December 22, 2020.

More and more, public relations professionals are finding that ethics in PR go beyond communication. Stakeholders and publics want companies to not only post on social media, but also to allocate resources, diversify leadership, and donate to social justice causes (Meyers, 2020; Mull, 2020). As PR professionals navigate these issues for their organizations, the need for ethics training is evident. A Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) report found that employers rate knowledge regarding ethical issues as one of the top three skills they seek in hiring employees (CPRE, 2018). The report recommended that a course focusing specifically on public relations ethics be required for undergraduate PR students (Bortree et al., 2018). In 2019, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) prescribed a PR Ethics course for all programs seeking certification in its Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) program. This coalescence of factors means that public relations programs need to revisit the ethical training they provide and explore a new path forward. This need was laid out in the CPRE report where it was recommended that all PR courses incorporate ethics into the curriculum and lessons center on "moral philosophy, case studies, and simulations" (Bortree et al., 2018, p. 68).

Ethics training is not new to journalism and mass communication programs, where public relations programs are often housed. The Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) positions ethics training as one of its professional values and competencies that programs must teach students, writing that students must "demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity" (ACEJMC, n.d.-b, para. 18). However, training in most programs tends to be broad and built on the ethics of journalism. As public relations operates differently than journalism, more specific ethics training for public relations is needed.

The purpose of this study is to explore how public relations programs both accredited by ACEJMC and certified by PRSA through the CEPR program address ethics in their curricula. Given the renewed emphasis on ethics education (CPRE, 2018), this research seeks to understand the state of ethics teaching in this specific subset of programs. As ACEJMC and CEPR represent some of the highest expectations and standards for teaching in journalism, mass communication, and public relations, schools that subject themselves to both reviews should reasonably be expected to have higher standards for ethical education.

Literature Review

Public Relations Ethics: Industry Perspectives

Most definitions and conceptualizations of ethics involve "systematic analysis, distinguishing right from wrong, and determining what should be valued" (Bowen, 2007, para. 2). In public relations, that manifests into a practice of valuing "honesty, openness, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication" (Bowen, 2007, para. 2). Historically, PR was viewed as void of ethics and as a profession that put too much energy into spinning and sensationalizing stories and not focusing on truth and relationship building (Bowen, 2007).

As the profession further embraces its role in the corporate suite, many PR professionals are serving as ethical compasses for their organization's leadership (Bowen, 2007). The PRSA Code of Ethics guides members and the profession as a whole on the ethical responsibilities of public relations professionals. The core professional values of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness help PR professionals serve the public good and achieve "excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism, and ethical conduct" (PRSA, n.d., para. 3).

Globally, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) adopted the Code of Athens in 1965, which was amended in 1968 and

again in 2009 (IPRA, 2009). The code's ethical recommendations to public relations professionals around the world encourage PR practitioners to work in three ethical realms: endeavoring, undertaking, and refraining. These codes center the need to establish and circulate the free flow of information, uphold human dignity, center the truth, avoid manipulation, and balance the concerns of publics and organizations (IPRA, 2009). Similarly, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA) offers a code of ethics that includes a declaration of principles and resources for ethics education and enforcement. GA argues in favor of working in the public interest; obeying laws and respecting diversity of local customs; freedom of speech; freedom of assembly; freedom of media; honesty, truth, and fact-based communication; integrity; transparency and disclosure; and privacy (GA, 2018).

Public Relations Ethics: Classroom Perspectives

Before public relations professionals enter the industry, their understanding of ethics often comes from their experiences within higher education. At the 2019 PRSA International Conference in San Diego, Elizabeth Toth moderated a conversation with public relations educators at the Educators Academy about how programs can begin to implement the CPRE's recommendations for ethics education. This presentation explored research around ethics, common ethical issues, core ethical competencies, implementation models, trends in ethics syllabi, creating a PR-specific ethics course, and increasing ethical lessons across the curriculum (Toth et al., 2019).

Accreditation

Administrators and professors often struggle with finding the right balance between skills-based courses, theory and conceptual classes, course requirements, electives, minors, and supplementary classes outside of the major or department (Blom et al., 2012). If a unit opts to seek accreditation for its program, that decision often brings

more considerations and requirements with how schools present the course catalog and descriptions to its students. Although the process of accrediting a program can limit and direct how a school builds its programs (e.g., the amount of credits a student can take within the major, see Blom et al., 2012), as of June 2020, 118 programs have earned accreditation by ACEJMC (ACEJMC, n.d.-a). Seamon (2010) argued that the limits imposed by accreditation make a broader curriculum more difficult, and highlighted a study noting that international public relations courses were stymied by accreditation limits (Hatzios & Lariscy, 2008). However, it should be noted that ACEJMC requirements have changed significantly since Seamon's work to be more open to curricular change, thus, an examination of how ethics training has been implemented in light of those changes is appropriate. Becoming an accredited program provides administrators and professors the opportunity to reflect on the program's successes and failures, compare itself to other programs, and assess whether its students are prepared for industry work (Blom et al., 2012). In addition to the internal evaluation, a school or department's accreditation status may influence students' decisions when they weigh options that include rankings, athletics, and extracurricular activities (Blom et al., 2012; Pellegrini, 2017). These internal and external opportunities provide an incentive for schools and departments with public relations programs to pursue the accreditation with ACEJMC or certification through PRSA.

ACEJMC

Although ACEJMC does not define exactly how units design their programs, the organization outlines nine core standards for accreditation: 1. Mission, governance, and administration; 2. Curriculum and instruction; 3. Diversity and inclusiveness; 4. Full-time and part-time faculty; 5. Scholarship, which includes research, creative, and professional service; 6. Student services; 7. Resources, facilities, and equipment; 8. Professional and public service; 9. Assessment of learning outcomes (ACEJMC,

n.d.-b). With each standard there is a basic principle and an outline of key indicators and evidence. These standards provide the rubric for how the programs are evaluated during the accreditation process. The process of accreditation happens every six years and programs complete a self-study before an accreditation team conducts a site visit. After the self-study and site visit, the national accrediting committee reviews the materials and votes, and then the national accrediting council takes final action (ACEJMC, n.d.-c).

PRSA Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR)

In 1989, the Public Relations Society of America established a certification for public relations programs through its educational affairs committee (PRSSA, 2020). Similar to the ACEJMC process, the CEPR requires programs to submit a self-assessment, followed by a site visit with two PRSA members. CEPR identifies eight standards, which include an analysis of the curriculum; faculty; resources, equipment, and facilities; students; assessment; professional affiliations; relationship with the unit and university; and perspectives on diversity and global public relations (PRSSA, 2020).

Value of Accreditation

Research suggests that most journalism and mass communication programs see accreditation as a path to reputation enhancement (Blom et al., 2012). There is no evidence to suggest that accredited schools are "better" than unaccredited schools, especially when it comes to social justice issues (e.g., human rights) (Blom et al., 2012; Reilly, 2018; Seamon, 2010). However, ethics is a key component attributed to professional and public service (ACEJMC) and curriculum and diversity and global perspectives (CEPR).

Pedagogy and Curricula

The previous standards review and research into accreditation suggests that incorporating ethics more robustly will be initiated

by the professor or the school. In 1999, in one of the earliest PR pedagogy articles, Coombs and Rybacki synthesized survey results and conversations that emerged from a pedagogy task force team at the National Communication Association (NCA) summer conference on public relations education. Coombs and Rybacki (1999) concluded the public relations pedagogy was "steeped in active learning" (p. 55). At the time, PR professors placed an emphasis on bridging theory and practice through dynamic assignments, lessons, and outside-of-the-classroom opportunities (Coombs & Rybacki, 1999). Since this trailblazing article on public relations pedagogy, scholars have explored pedagogy through the lens of writing (e.g., Hardin & Pompper, 2004; Waymer, 2014), social media (e.g., Kim & Freberg, 2016), and international perspectives (e.g., Thompson, 2018).

Public Relations Curricula

Public relations scholars who study PR curriculum note that there has been a transition toward a more skills-based, professional focus (Auger & Cho, 2016). For some, the shift to a more professionally minded profession can erode what some believe is the purpose of higher education, which is to pursue knowledge for the sake of pursuing knowledge (Auger & Cho, 2016; Brint et al., 2005). Attempting to focus on skills-based lessons can result in the exclusion of topics such as race, globalization, and interdisciplinary perspectives (Auger & Cho, 2016).

A powerful indicator of curricula decisions and priorities can result from the organization in which a public relations program is housed. Public relations programs are sometimes housed in journalism and mass communication schools but are found equally in speech, liberal arts, and business departments and schools (Kruckeberg, 1998). In their study of 234 public relations programs, Auger and Cho (2016) found that more than half (57%) of PR programs were affiliated with the liberal arts and humanities and almost one-third (38%) were housed in communication

and journalism schools.

For course offerings, Auger and Cho (2016) found that the liberal arts (53%) and journalism schools (57%) were more likely to offer ethics courses than the public relations programs housed in business schools (31%). The most common type of classes across the curricula were principles/introductory classes, mass communication theory, law, writing, campaigns, and research (Auger & Cho, 2016). Only 51% of programs offered a media ethics class in their curricula, while only 3% offered a specific public relations ethics course (Auger & Cho, 2016).

Public Relations Skills

As previously discussed, public relations curricula programs are often labeled as a practical field, meaning students can expect to encounter applicable hard and soft skills that they can transfer to their internships and professional careers. As McCleneghan (2006) suggests, "No other profession requires greater knowledge of 'how to' communicate than public relations" (p. 42). Almost every year some think-piece pitches a list of the most important skills PR students need to know once they graduate. For example, in 2013, *The Guardian* listed those skills as communication, research, writing, international mindset, and creativity (Turner, 2013). Seven years later in 2020, the media monitoring and social listening platform Meltwater identified the top 10 skills as: social media, copyrighting, management, multimedia and new media skills, analytics, visual branding, writing, virtual team management, and influencer collaboration (Garrett, 2020).

Public relations scholars have explored the topics of how relevant skills translate from the classroom into the professional world. For example, in 2014, Todd surveyed PRSA members on 24 quantitative categories divided into two subgroups, job skills and professional characteristics, to determine how prepared entry-level workers were for the workforce. The goal of this survey was to determine how Millennial

(born between 1982-2002), entry-level workers rate themselves compared to their supervisors, and the survey's 165 participants were asked to rank themselves or their entry-level employees on the following skills: writing, technology, research, social media, computer, job task preparation, and overall quality of work and performance (Todd, 2014). In addition to these practical skills, Todd (2014) identified professional characteristics (i.e., soft skills) that were key performance indicators in the public relations profession (e.g., awareness of ethics, creativity, cooperation, and time management). The "pressure to teach students the most relevant knowledge and skills to be industry-ready" is one that educators are familiar with, and assessments like these can illuminate how recent graduates are performing (Todd, 2014, p. 790).

The Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) found that writing is a core skill for future public relations professionals and should be included in every public relations class. In addition to writing, the report suggests that research remains a foundational skill with particular attention paid to data, analytics, and big data (CPRE, 2018). Finally, technology is seen as a "triple threat challenge" (i.e., educators must teach it, study it, and do it) (CPRE, 2018, p. 14). Along with these tangible skills, the report also stressed the need for the incorporation of ethics (CPRE, 2018).

Ethics as a Skill

Research suggests that educators, professionals, mentors, and advisers agree that ethics is a key skill for graduates (Eschenfelder, 2011). In public relations programs, ethics is often covered in principles, writing, campaigns, and case studies in the classroom and in textbooks (Hutchinson, 2002). These more traditional, static forms of learning ethics, however, might contribute to entry-level public relations professionals overestimating their ability to practice and understand ethical principles and their decision-making skills (Eschenfelder, 2011). Conway and

Groshek (2009) suggest that students might gain more from interactive experiences through student media and internships, and Curtin et al. (2011) found that mentors (e.g., PRSA industry advisers and PRSSA faculty advisers) can influence younger workers as they consider ethical dilemmas (also see Todd, 2009). Furthermore, ethics competency is a skill that employers seek from new hires and one that educators feel compelled to teach (DiStaso et al., 2009). Unfortunately, employers rated their employees low on ethics skills (Todd, 2014). These studies suggest that the key to students gaining these skills outside of the classroom in meaningful ways is through dynamic coursework, such as service and project-based learning (e.g., McCollough, 2018), student-run agencies (e.g., Haley et al., 2016), and internships. According to experiential learning theory, this type of learning environment is vital for students as they understand and process experiences into knowledge.

Experiential Learning Theory

According to Dewey (1938) and other scholars of experiential learning theory (ELT), the theory is best understood as a "theory of experience" (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 193). This work draws on learning as the "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" and learning is the result of "grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). ELT focuses on the process rather than the outcome, and scholars of experiential learning theory identify six pillars that facilitate experience as a key component to human learning and development. These pillars can be summarized as: learning as a holistic process that creates knowledge; learning as relearning; and learning as a process that involves transactions between a person and their environment, which are primarily driven by finding solutions for conflict, difference, and disagreements (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Using ELT as a foundation in understanding knowledge acquisition, students can grasp experiences through concrete experience (apprehension) and abstract

conceptualization (comprehension) and can transform through reflective observation (intension) and active experimentation (extension) (Baker et al., 2002; Fraustino et al., 2015; Kolb, 1984). These tactics work together and provide students with the experience of process: they can engage, internalize, observe and analyze, and then experiment with conclusions (Fraustino et al., 2015).

ELT and the Strategic Communication Classroom

Scholarship suggests that public relations professors and instructors are looking to incorporate ELT-driven lessons, assignments, and projects into the public relations classroom. For example, Fraustino et al. (2015) studied the relationship between Twitter chats and digital case studies (i.e., using the now defunct app Storify) and whether students apply public relations concepts to those practices. Other scholars have explored how students engage in teleworking in a cross-institutional setting (Madden et al., 2016), service learning and empathy (Everhart et al., 2016), public relations writing (Meganck & Smith, 2019), and learning about journalism storytelling through Instagram Stories (Byrd & Denney, 2018).

Research Questions

To understand the present state of ethics education at ACEJMC-accredited and CEPR-certified schools, the present study examines the following research questions:

RQ1: How do programs following both the ACEJMC and CEPR guidelines address ethics writ large in their curricula?

RQ2: How are ethics addressed in public-relations-specific courses in ACEJMC and CEPR accredited programs?

Method

To answer the research questions, we compiled a list of ACEJMC accredited programs (n = 112), PRSA CEPR programs (n = 40), and determined which programs were listed in both (n = 15). After we

identified the 15 schools with ACEJMC accreditation and PRSA CEPR certification, we analyzed the 2020 programs of study and course catalogs to determine what kind of public relations program each school offered (e.g., major, concentration, or emphasis area), number of credit hours required inside and outside of the unit, if there were ethics-specific courses available and/or required, if there was a PR-ethics-specific course available and/or required, and which courses specifically mentioned ethics in their course descriptions. To achieve internal validity, the research team first coded three universities collectively and then each of the three researchers individually coded the four remaining schools.

The method of content analysis was chosen for multiple reasons. First, it provided an evidence-based analysis of the offerings and requirements of the programs. While previous studies regarding public relations education used a survey approach (DiStaso et al., 2009; Neill, 2017; Silverman et al., 2014), curriculum studies from other disciplines in mass communication found course descriptions to be a fruitful avenue for analysis (Spillman et al., 2017; Tanner et al., 2012). Second, as course names and descriptions are used as indicators of course content and catalogs as indicators of program requirements, their use here is congruent. Finally, content analysis proved to be an expeditious way to collect data, as some previous studies saw low response rates and used content analysis to supplement their data (e.g., Tanner et al., 2012).

Findings

To address RQ1, we examined the listings of required courses for the public relations programs at each school. Of the 15 schools, 10 offered public relations as a major, two as an emphasis area, two as a concentration, and one as a specialization. Most schools required students to complete 34-48 credit hours (with three schools requiring 48, and six schools requiring 36-39 credit hours) in public relations and related classes. Programs required as few as three and as many as 27 credit hours

be taken outside of the major (e.g., business or statistics classes). Six schools required zero credit hours outside of the program.

Most schools taught elective ethics overall in the form of mass communication ethics, ethics and law, and/or media ethics courses (87%). Thirteen of the 15 schools offered one of these courses—tending to approach ethics similar to the University of Florida (n.d.-a), which described them as a cross-disciplinary introduction to study and practice. Fewer schools required students to take a general mass communication ethics class (67%). Thus, it is possible for a third of these public relations students to graduate without any department ethics training. Furthermore, 13% of students appeared to have no or limited access to ethics training within their major.

To answer RQ2, we analyzed the course descriptions for each of the programs. Only five universities offered an elective in PR-specific ethics (33%) and fewer schools required a public-relations-specific ethics course (20%). Drake University (n.d.-a) had an elective course called Cases in Ethical PR Practice that prepared students through "instruction and practice to execute professional-level thinking, analysis, writing and presentation skills needed for successful public relations campaign management" (Drake University, n.d.-b, para. 1). The University of Florida (n.d.-b) offered an Ethics and Professional Responsibility in Public Relations course, which focused on "ethical responsibilities of the public relations professional" (para. 1). This course provided knowledge and skills for study to "reach and justify ethical decisions," which elicits "a sense of personal and professional responsibility" (para. 1).

The findings suggest that most students receive their ethics training through interdisciplinary study, focusing on the intersection of law, ethics, and mass communication professions (e.g., journalism, advertising, media studies). Public relations ethics, on the other hand, are more likely to be a learning objective or talking point in courses such as principles

of/introduction to public relations, campaigns, and some case studies courses. Five programs addressed ethics in the course description for their Principles of Public Relations classes. These classes indicated topics will cover "ethics and social responsibility" (Syracuse University, n.d., para. 1) or "persuasion, media relations, crisis communication, reputation management, and ethics" (Indiana University, n.d., para. 2), many of which explored different ethical approaches and introduced students to codes of ethics (e.g., PRSA). This positioning indicates that schools recognize the need to introduce ethics early.

Some schools engaged with ethics instruction and scholarship through journalism, multimedia, or advertising classes. The University of Memphis (n.d.), for example, offered an elective class for public relations students in multimedia storytelling in which students could expect to learn and understand "legal and ethical issues in photography" (para. 1). The University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh (n.d.) offered a course in Special Topics in Writing/Editing, which addressed several topics, including media ethics.

These findings indicate that although ethics is an important part of a public relations student's curricula, there is an opportunity to expand this offering of public-relations-specific ethics courses.

Discussion

After analyzing the programs at 15 ACEJMC and PRSA CEPR schools, this study's findings suggest there is room for growth regarding public relations ethics education. Through our analysis of selected public relations programs, we have concluded that public relations programs need to revisit their PR ethics requirements. Given ACEJMC accredited and PRSA certified schools have chosen to hold themselves to higher standards, they must be leaders in adopting the CPRE and PRSA recommendations for PR ethics training. Based on their accreditation and certification and the standards of both, the 15 programs in our study should

be leading the way on teaching ethics and providing students with the dynamic opportunities to engage the subject matter. The fact that 80% of students might graduate without a PR ethics course and a third of students can graduate without an ethics course at all, sets students up for difficulty in the industry upon graduation. As employers expect ethical knowledge in their hires, universities need to respond by providing ethics training to students.

Experiential Learning Theory in the Ethics Classroom

The CPRE (2018) report outlines a new course proposal summary for faculty and administrators wishing to build a new PR ethics class based on the recommendations from the undergraduate education report. The report outlines key outcomes and assessment metrics, which include written assignments, class discussions, quizzes, exams, presentations, and projects (Bortree et al., 2019). The provided catalog descriptions focus on students engaging in "discussions and case studies" and being able to "apply learning from the course to an original case study paper" (Bortree et al., 2019, p. 3). In addition, courses should "bridge cultural applications and offer practical insights on how communicators . . . might develop communication strategies that uphold ethical principles" (Bortree et al., 2019, p. 3).

The active language used in these course and catalog descriptions and the proposed assignments suggest that an experiential learning approach would be best suited for the instruction of PR ethics. Research suggests that lectures on ethics are not as valuable as case studies (Canary, 2007; Todd, 2009), and many students are receiving their ethical training through internships and mentors (Conway & Groshek, 2009; Curtin et al., 2011; Todd, 2014). Although internships and real-world opportunities are wonderful learning tools for students, there is little guarantee that ethics will be practiced in a consistent manner, which makes these environments a challenge.

For many internships and mentor-driven relationships, the outcome might outweigh the process. Given that experiential learning is process-driven and, as Kolb and Kolb (2005) describe, "a theory of experience" (p. 193), students must be exposed to ethics through a number of different processes and experiences. Our findings indicate that most conversations around ethics are happening in siloed spaces, such as in relationships with the law or as a dedicated week during an introduction to a public relations class. For students to grasp and transform experiences around ethical dilemmas and cases, approaching the subject manner in a way that lets them work together and experience the process is key for entry-level public relations professionals developing the critical thinking needed for this important skill (Eschenfelder, 2011). A standalone ethics course would be a major step toward resolving these issues and would answer the call for greater ethics education from previous research (DiStaso et al., 2009; Neill, 2017; Silverman et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Based on the previous research presented in this study and our own findings, we recommend that public relations programs implement and require a case-study-based public relations ethics course for their advanced-level students. This class should be completed at a level greater than foundational public relations courses and should draw on real work to provide students with the opportunity to grasp and transform the experience of an ethical situation. In this course, students can process the dilemma, engage, internalize, observe and analyze, and experiment with different conclusions (see Fraustino et al., 2015).

In addition to a case study class, professors and administrators should consider including the word ethics in course descriptions for experiential learning courses, client work, and capstone classes (e.g., internships, student-run agencies, research, and campaigns). Addressing ethics in all facets of a student's education and creating a specific public-

relations-centered ethics course would help students graduate with a more robust understanding of what it means to be an ethical public relations professional.

The present study is limited in its scope by only examining ACEJMC and CEPR programs. Although the population of universities utilized in this study makes sense for examining those at the highest standards, further investigation across both review bodies would present a clearer picture of the state of public relations education. Future studies should examine these schools as well as public relations programs without certification or accreditation.

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No.3, 29-65

Public Relations Education in Singapore: Educating the Next Generation of Practitioners on Ethics

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This study examines if PR education adequately prepares students for the workplace, particularly in the practice of ethics in the context of Singapore, which has been described as one of "Asia's economic tigers" (BBC, 2018). This study, thus, aims to first, elucidate the state of PR education specifically in relation to how PR ethics is taught in Singapore. Second, it examines how ethics education prepares students for the workplace in Singapore. Data comes from examining the syllabi of 14 universities in Singapore, both local and international, and interviews with 20 academics and practitioners. Findings suggest there are varying degrees in which ethics is offered by these universities, with clear variation between local and international universities. Findings also suggest that industry practitioners find the teaching of ethics useful for the marketplace while recognizing that ethics cannot be imposed or instituted on the individuals.

Keywords: ethics, Singapore, PR curriculum, international education, ethics education

Editorial Record: Special issue deadline June 15, 2020. Revision submitted October 29, 2020. First published online December 22, 2020.

The challenge in designing a public relations (PR) curriculum is to ensure that it is intellectually rigorous while at the same time relevant to the industry. Given the myriad of ethical challenges the industry has faced in recent years, the need to devise a curriculum centered on ethics is heightened. Ethical practitioners can guide organizations from avoidable crises and incorporating ethics in PR curriculum is historically and consistently recommended (Bivins, 1991; McInerny, 1998; Smethers, 1998).

The European PR Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) found ethics to be the most valued out of 27 listed courses (Cotton & Tench, 2009). In 2017, ethics became the sixth compulsory component of an ideal PR education curriculum (CPRE, 2018). This means PR education has to be properly designed and implemented to produce professionally competent and ethical practitioners who are able to further their organizations' interests while preserving stakeholders' interests. Ethical, professional practice not only contributes to an organization's image and reputation building, but also generates cost savings by reducing the occurrence or impact of crises. Similarly, the relevance of PR education lies in its pertinence to practice (Middlewood et. al, 1999).

In Singapore, PR positions are difficult to fill (Lee, 2015) as the industry generally prefers experienced practitioners who are assumed to have the requisite competencies, among which is a grounding in ethics (Pang & Yeo, 2012). Entry-level PR positions require a degree, a wide range of skills, and approximately one to two years of relevant experience. This poses an intriguing question: How does PR education in Singapore, particularly the practice of ethics, prepare students for the workplace?

As a city-state with a population of approximately 5.5 million people, Singapore is a financial and business hub with a highly educated population (Gleason, 2018). Many multinational industries are located

in Singapore, and the city-state has been described as one of "Asia's economic tigers" (BBC, 2018). Singaporeans believe having a college education is the key to success (Cheng, 2015) and are pressured into obtaining one (Davie, 2011).

Singapore's tertiary education system consists of four public autonomous universities and 10 commercial private education institutions partnered with overseas universities. The National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) consistently appear in the list of global top universities. Based on the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (Davie, 2020), NUS is ranked 11th while NTU is ranked 13th.

Worldwide, public universities have stringent admissions criteria (Watts, 2006), and each year, thousands of applicants do not qualify for admissions ("4,400 A-Level students," 2016). To provide an alternative (Waters & Leung, 2014), Singapore opened its doors to overseas applicants (Mok, 2008). Students from Asia and other parts of the world move to Singapore to enroll in universities, cementing Singapore as a global education hub (Sidhu et al., 2011). As of 2018, there were 65,600 students of different nationalities studying in Singapore (Leow, 2019).

Studies have examined the state of PR education in America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East (Zhang et al., 2012). Few studies, however, have examined PR in Singapore (see Lim et al., 2005; Lwin & Pang, 2014; Pang & Yeo, 2009; Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009). This study is arguably the first to examine how PR ethics is taught in Singapore. Although senior practitioners are valued for their competencies and experience, students should not be ignored as they are "customers of and investors in public relations" (Erzikova, 2010, p. 188) and become new practitioners and further the practice. This means PR education must be properly designed and implemented to produce professionally competent and ethical practitioners.

Ethical and professional practice not only contribute to an organization's image and reputation building, but also generate cost savings by reducing the occurrence and impact of crises. Similarly, the relevance of PR education lies in its pertinence to practice (Middlewood et al., 1999). As such, the teaching of ethics is geared toward preparing students for PR and not toward work in any particular industry.

This study aims to first expound upon the state of PR education and how PR ethics is taught in Singapore. Second, it examines how teaching ethics in universities based in Singapore prepares students for the workplace. This goal fits the theme of this special issue.

Increasingly, there has been a need to understand how PR and PR education are conducted in various contexts. This was the inspiration for the 2017 book by Kwansah-Aidoo and George, *Culture and Crisis Communication: Transboundary Cases from Nonwestern Perspectives*. By examining PR education in Singapore, this study helps to further build on this repository of knowledge of different contexts around the world. This study also supports the research found in the fall 2020 edition of *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, which invited contributions from top scholars in regions such as Africa, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Louisa Ha (2020), editor of *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, wrote:

> We know too little about the media and communication in these regions. Their similarities to or differences from the Western countries can validate existing theories, improve or modify current theories, challenge existing theories, and propose new theories. We want to . . . stimulate the interest of Western scholars on research in these countries and see the value of these studies. We also want to encourage authors from these regions to see what have been done on their countries that have been published in our journal. (pp. 569-570)

Literature Review

Teaching Ethics in PR Education

The need to cultivate professional ethics for practice and to establish a standard for conduct (Barry & Ohland, 2009) has led to a demand for PR ethics courses (Davis, 1999). Some researchers argue that ethics must become an element across curricula (Erzikova, 2010; Hornaman & Sriramesh, 2003; McInerny, 1998; Smethers, 1998). This is due to universities being "viewed as the place where training in ethics should take place prior to graduates entering the workforce" (Moore, 2008, p. 6). Universities are also seen as instruments for inducing positive change in students' ethical standards and behaviors (Pratt & McLaughlin, 1989) and the "major line of defense" (Watts, 2006, p. 104) before new graduates enter the industry.

The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) is the leading authority on PR education and provides recommendations on how PR is taught, and by extension, how PR ethics is taught. In the first of its 12 tenets of an ideal PR curriculum, the CPRE (1999) noted that ethical issues and ethical decision-making are necessary components in undergraduate PR education. According to the CPRE (1999), undergraduate students should obtain knowledge on ethical issues and ethical decision-making skills as well as on legal issues such as privacy, defamation, copyright, product liability, and financial disclosure. In addition, the CPRE suggested legal and regulatory compliance and credibility be taught to students. In its 2006 report, the CPRE suggested that ethics be integrated throughout the PR curriculum, "suggesting short one-hour courses or mini seminars can provide a meaningful ethics forum" (p. 24). In response, some educators argue that ethics should be incorporated into all PR courses (Silverman et al., 2014), while others believe that having an independent course, as well as integrating ethics throughout the curriculum, is the most ideal (Neill, 2017).

In teaching ethics, Ballard et al. (2014) suggested students develop communication ethics literacy through learning. This includes: (a) ethics in human communication, which is comprised of "ancient and/or contemporary theories of ethics to identify what is good, right, or virtuous in communication" (Ballard et al., 2014, p. 6); (b) drawing on moral instincts to understand ethical notions; and (c) conceiving communication and ethics as equal, symbiotic, and mutually-influencing. Ballard et al. (2014) argue these themes provide rigorous learning of communication ethics.

Teaching Ethics that are Locally Relevant

Teaching ethics has become an international challenge (Austin & Toth, 2011; Bampton & Maclagan, 2005; Clarkeburn, 2002; Clarkeburn et al., 2002; Davidson et al., 2003; Goldie et al., 2002; Park et al., 2012; Smith & Bath, 2006). While the recommendations by the CPRE are highly relevant, there is an equally strong need to adapt these to specific contexts and not adopt materials "verbatim without any attempt to align the contents with the environmental contexts of the native country" (Sriramesh, 2004, p. 322). Echoing this, Wang (2011) argued for greater adaptation of Western theories and ideas to specific contexts in Asia.

The challenges facing the internationalization of ethics education are threefold. These include: (a) a shortage of educators in ethics; (b) educators lacking experience in ethics education (Avci, 2017); and (c) a lack of resources, unstructured syllabi, and packed curricula that handicap the development and delivery of ethics education (Byrne et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2010; Rasche et al., 2013). Compounding these challenges is the lack of a conclusively effective pedagogical method for delivering ethics education (Avci, 2017).

Studies on teaching ethics in different contexts return various findings. While ethics is often incorporated into the curricula of PR campaigns classes (81%), introductory courses (80%), and PR

management courses (47%) or is taught as a unit in Principles of PR, PR Writing, PR Case Studies, PR Campaigns, and International PR courses (Silverman et al., 2014), Chung and Choi (2012) found only 14% of U.S. universities offered PR Ethics. In the UK, 40% of universities offer a course in PR ethics, while in South Korea, 45% of its universities offer a course in ethics (Chung & Choi, 2012). Interestingly, although Thailand emulates the U.S. curriculum structure (Ekachai & Komolsevin, 1998), most universities offered at least two general or mass media ethics or law courses that taught codes of ethics, PR effects, or corporate social responsibility, but none was specific to PR (Chaisuwan, 2009). Similarly, ethics is integrated into open and generic courses such as Communication Ethics or Communication Law in Portugal (Goncalves et al., 2013), and in Spain, only 9% of Spanish universities with PR education had a PR law or ethics course (Xifra, 2007). Universities in the United Arab Emirates adapted courses such as PR History and PR Ethics and Law into PR and the Islamic/Arabic Heritage and Islamic Ethical Theory and Arabic Law (Creedon et al., 1995), and most universities in India offer at least two general or mass media ethics or law courses that taught codes of ethics, PR effects, and corporate social responsibility, but none was specific to PR (Chaisuwan, 2009). Finally, Austin and Toth's (2011) study of 39 countries besides the US found that ethics is not taught as an independent course but is integrated throughout the curriculum.

In 2018, the CPRE called for ethics to be integrated throughout the PR curriculum and argued that "ethics knowledge is essential to PR education; it is no longer optional or elective" (p. 67). Subsequently, the CPRE (2018) recommended ethics courses teach moral philosophy and conduct analyses using rigorous philosophical methods and critical thinking. Presently, there is no research examining the state of PR ethics education in Singapore, which leads us to the first research question:
RQ1: Where does ethics situate in the PR curricula among universities based in Singapore?

Relevance of Ethics Education to the Industry

Although educators indicate students are well-prepared in regard to ethics education, reality suggests otherwise. New practitioners were found to overestimate their ability to advise on ethics (Kim & Johnson, 2009; Todd, 2014) and in terms of ethical awareness, 82.4% of new practitioners rated themselves as quite or completely competent in ethical decision making, while 34.2% of employers rated them as good or very good at it (Kim & Johnson, 2009). In their survey of Millennial employees at PR agencies using three workplace scenarios, Curtin et al. (2011) found these young practitioners preferred to avoid an issue by referring to a superior (53.5%) in the first scenario, waiting for someone else to respond in the second scenario (69.5%), or following the superior's orders (52%) to pose as an activist group member in the third scenario. Their results suggested practitioners may be either overconfident in their ethical capabilities or are being evasive, with the former suggesting a certain curricular success and the latter calling into question the relevance of PR education to industry practice.

Research that examined students' views of the relevance of ethics education is limited. U.S. students have been found to demonstrate an incomplete understanding of PR functions and inadequate knowledge of ethics, public affairs, and risk management, which leads them to not instinctively associate PR with ethics, feel that ethics is absent from the practice or poorly emphasized in school, and feel that PR is unethical and manipulative and has no strong ethical base to guide it (S. A. Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2003) argued that both educators and the industry were responsible for allowing the unquestioning perpetuation of negative connotations, which clearly highlights a need for integrating ethics across curricula to reinforce the practice's promise and devotion to high ethical standards.

In order to integrate theory with practice in ethics education,

service learning was found to have advanced students' moral reasoning to the highest level (Waters & Burton, 2008) as well as honed students' knowledge of diverse publics and ethical responsibilities as practitioners (Motley & Sturgill, 2013). More importantly, Place (2018) found service learning strengthened students' ethics competency in a realistically simulated environment with assistance from their clients. Internships (Conway & Groshek, 2008) are a way for hands-on learning and application of knowledge, skills, and ethics in the industry and clearly demonstrate the industry has a crucial role in training and ethically preparing students for future practice.

Despite the many pedagogical approaches to imparting ethics, there is no consensus on which method is most effective (Avci, 2017). Universities are under pressure to design their curricula to meet industry needs, and in short, it is a simple matter of supply and demand. As Breaux et al. (2010) mused, "if recruiters do not value ethics . . . should colleges and universities offer these courses?" (p. 4).

Most educators concur on subjects that constitute a good PR curriculum (Hornaman & Sriramesh, 2003) and agree that graduates should possess ethical values and orientation, which are crucial leadership qualities (Berger & Meng, 2010; Erzikova & Berger, 2012). Silverman et al. (2014) found educators believe that teaching ethics to PR students is critical while the CPRE (2018) reported that educators and practitioners support ethics knowledge, skills, and abilities as crucial for entry-level practitioners. As practitioners, PR graduates function as their organization's ethics counselor (Bivins, 1991; Bowen, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 1996; Fitzpatrick & Gauthier 2001), and it is imperative that students have relevant education, rather than be in another related communications field to "practice a more sophisticated model of PR" (Hornaman & Sriramesh, 2003, p. 4).

Teaching ethics to prepare students for the workplace involves

increasing students' awareness of ethical issues (Conway & Groshek, 2008), strengthening their moral reasoning skills (Clarkeburn et al., 2002; Lau, 2010; Park et al., 2012), readjusting their simplistic or idealistic ethical thinking into a more sophisticated manner (Plaisance, 2007), having them participate in and interpret complex dilemmas (Ballard et al., 2014), and working on cultivating their future ethical leadership capability (Gale & Bunton, 2005). These actions demonstrate that ethics education is not simply teaching students to think and behave morally, but rather consists of helping them cultivate and internalize crucial skills in critical thinking, reasoning, analysis, and leadership. This helps contribute to students' personal, moral, and professional growth (Eschenfelder, 2011) and capability to serve as an organization's ethics counselor (Bivins, 1991; Bowen, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 1996; Fitzpatrick & Gauthier 2001).

In Singapore, studies found that PR practitioners spend most of their time on technical duties (Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009). Practitioners serve as generalists or technicians by virtue of their job scope, qualifications, skills, and background (Pang & Yeo, 2012). This leads us to the second question.

RQ2: How does teaching ethics prepare students for the workplace among universities based in Singapore?

Method

For this study, we employ two methods: document analysis and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. These methods enable us to obtain "convergence and corroboration" (G. A. Bowen, 2009, p. 28).

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to analyze courses offered in undergraduate curricula from universities in Singapore offering mass communication and/or public relations programs. Programs that focused on journalism, marketing, advertising, media studies, or communication design were not studied as they neither provided students with direct

PR knowledge and skills nor a career pathway. Although there were institutions that offered double majors and/or double degrees, this study examines only the curricula components related to mass communication and/or public relations. However, programs that were accompanied by a journalism, marketing, or advertising specialization providing complementary skills and knowledge that would benefit a new practitioner were included in this study. Units of analysis consisted of course titles, description, and outcomes acquired via course syllabi. Four local and 10 overseas Singaporean universities were examined, with complete data from 12 of the 14 universities obtained. Data was acquired in October 2016, which equates to scientific validity of the study only corresponding to the academic year 2016-2017.

Previous studies (see Austin & Toth, 2011; Goncalves et al., 2013) that examined PR curricula did not name universities when comparing curricula, and no reasons were provided. Conceivably, it could be to describe the programs while being mindful of not downplaying any program. Even though this study lists all the universities studied, to protect the identities of the programs, this study follows a similar approach.

Data Analysis

Data was first organized into prescribed themes. To develop additional themes for analysis, thematic analysis was carried out via "careful, more focused re-reading and review of the data" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 32) and "coding and category construction, based on the data's characteristics, to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon" (G. A. Bowen, 2009, p. 32). For instance, a digital/new media course was present in 11 syllabi. Descriptors were extracted, combined, and refined from course descriptions to construct an overall course category property. Emergent concepts were derived from examining characteristics drawn from each course description (G. A. Bowen, 2009).

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were used to examine academics' as well as practitioners' views on the role of ethics in the PR industry. A semi-structured interview method was chosen to provide independence and adaptability in adding questions to the questionnaire (Owen, 2014; Pang & Yeo, 2012). Twenty interviewees were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Curriculum directors (CDs) from local universities and private institutions, many of whom are subject matter experts in the field of PR. Among seven CDs, three were from local universities and four from overseas universities.
2. Educators were included only when recommended by CDs or serving as a substitute for non-participating CDs to ensure the quality of data obtained.
3. Ten senior practitioners in PR or corporate communications were included.

Interviews were conducted throughout November 2016, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. All interviewees regardless of role are considered subject matter experts with senior academics and practitioners serving as "elite interviews" (Bowen, 2008, p. 278). CDs helm curricular improvement, development, suitability, and rigor (Doll et al., 1958), and understand the industry's needs, while senior practitioners provide insights on hiring expectations and relevance of and improvements for PR education. The selection criteria created participant homogeneity (Guest et al., 2006) and similarity in responses (Bryman, 2012) to allow the study to reach saturation. Given these experts have shared knowledge and experience and "tend to agree more with each other with respect to their particular domain of expertise" (Guest et al., 2006, p. 74), 20 interviews were viewed as sufficient.

Data analysis began with re-reading the transcripts to identify

codes (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and used McLeod's (2003) immersion, categorization, phenomenological reduction, triangulation, and interpretation stages. Codes represent notions or observations in the data (Lancy, 1993) that can be based on themes derived from theories and research questions (Pang et al., 2017). During immersion and categorization, the data were scrutinized for meaningful details and categorized and sub-categorized using literature and research questions as analytical frameworks. During phenomenological reduction, immersion and categorization were cyclically repeated and improved as additional themes and interpretations emerged. Finally, themes and sets of connections were analyzed, evaluated, and connected to accepted entrenched theories, arguments, and interpretations.

Findings

The first research question focused on where ethics situates in the PR curricula among universities in Singapore. This study examined undergraduate mass communication and/or public relations curricula of 14 universities in Singapore: four local, two U.S., four U.K. and four Australian universities based in Singapore. The findings for RQ1 are grouped according to the university's nationality for clear presentation and ease of analysis and comparison.

Ethics in Singapore Universities

Ethics and/or law are covered within a course in 10 of the 14 universities' curricula. Among the local universities, ethics was found within a combination of core or elective courses or was subsumed within another related course. Among the private, overseas universities, ethics was present as a core course and/or integrated into another subject.

Ethics was taught as both a standalone course or integrated into several courses among three of the four public autonomous universities. The standalone courses appeared to be comprehensively taught as they provided students with basic knowledge on media law, ethics and policy

as well as "practical grounding on media law and ethics by presenting a wide spectrum of legal issues and ethical dilemmas faced by media practitioners" (a local university), and "addresses psychological theories of moral development, ethical theories in public relations, models of ethical reasoning, professionalism, codes of ethics, ethical strategic management, corporate social responsibility, and the fundamental aspect of ethically managing relationships with stakeholders" (a local university). One aimed to help students "recognize and resolve moral issues, develop critical thinking and analytical skills, appreciate the complexities of ethical issues confronting communication management practitioners." In particular, two of the local universities taught media ethics and law with a particular emphasis on Singapore. Among the three local universities, ethics was commonly integrated into writing courses (Basic Media Writing, Online Journalism, and Writing for Print and Emerging Media) and strategic media (Digital Media Entrepreneurship, Advertising Strategies, and Strategic Social Media Management). One local university exhibited low coverage of ethics, which was part of the persuasion corporate responsibility courses, as its communication program was offered as a major rather than a full bachelor's degree program when compared to its local counterparts. Among the local universities, one university had 10 courses containing elements of ethics/law. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the program admits working adults and was designed to meet their career or professional needs. Although another local university's program had nine courses with elements of ethics, it should be noted that two were related to journalism, one was listed under advertising, one was available only to honors students, and another was the objective for an Advanced Communication Campaigns course.

Ethics in Singapore-Based Overseas Universities

Though ethics as a subject was found in three Australian programs, it was not evident in the final program. Among the three Australian

programs, two taught ethics as a standalone course, whereas one was taught as part of the Foundations of Public Relations and Influence and Impact in Public Relations courses. Ethics was also taught in another program's Radio News course where it helped students to "develop critical thinking skills and establish professional practices within journalism's ethical and legal parameters." The fourth program taught Workplace Law, which did not appear relevant to PR as course descriptions were unavailable for analysis.

Of the two U.S. programs, only one appeared to examine ethics using "selected texts dealing with one or more of the three basic concepts: 'The True,' 'The Good,' and 'The Beautiful'." Among the four U.K. programs, only one had a standalone ethics course, which provided an understanding on free speech and privacy "within a historical, philosophical and ethical context" and "a critical understanding of the historical and political framework" of media regulations. As the course description for Advertising: Research and Regulation was unavailable, the study would assume that ethics or law educational elements were present within the course by virtue of the course title.

Differences Between Singapore and Overseas Universities

Ethics was primarily taught in a theoretical manner among the overseas universities and was given some form of practice in the local universities' writing courses. Although some of the local and overseas programs had practical courses (e.g., capstones, campaigns), ethics was not mentioned. While some courses appeared to examine issues (e.g., Managing a Communication Business, Contemporary PR Research), the titles can be nebulous and may not necessarily mean or refer to ethics and/or law. Lastly, it was interesting to note that Crisis Communication and Management, which invariably discusses ethics, was offered as a course by all four local universities, while it was largely absent in most of the overseas programs except for one Australian program.

Ethics Forms the Bedrock of PR Education

In response to the question of how important ethics is in PR education, one academic noted ethics forms the basis of a PR education:

> Yes, of course, it should be in the curriculum because as part of the relationships between an organization and the society around it, PR people—as anybody who makes critical decisions—have a responsibility for ethical behavior, their own and that of the organization's.

Another respondent noted this reinforces the notion that ethics should be taken seriously in the workplace:

> I think it is essential to at least signal to the students what the professional standards are because there is a real danger that in their enthusiasm to achieve their objectives, they are going to compromise on ethics . . . I think ethics have to be integrated into these classes.

Teaching Ethics in PR Education

In response to the question of how universities devised their curriculum, one academic suggested that ethics should be integrated in all classes:

> You should choose integration because the danger of the standalone is that maybe you are not getting the information about the OB [out-of-bounds] markers at the right time, maybe it seems like something you are learning for this course rather than learning to integrate into your professional life. So, the essential thing is ethics be integrated into cases, it is only valuable to the extent of sending a broad signal of where the boundaries are.

OB markers are defined as the parameters under which organizations work in Singapore. Euphemistically called OB markers or "out-of-bounds," they included sensitive topics such as language, race, religion, foreign politics, and unsubstantiated criticism of public institutions (Cheong, 2013). Pang

et al. (2014) argued "practitioners acknowledged that the onus was on them to understand these sensitivities. Failure to do so would backfire on the organization even if there was no intention to breach any unwritten rules" (p. 282).

Another academic felt the way ethics was taught in a curriculum depended on the availability of educators:

> If there is a mature PR curriculum that is diverse and has excellent teachers, those will be able to integrate ethical thinking into their courses. That's one way of doing it. If you don't have instructors or curriculum that lends itself to doing that, having a separate course is better.

In response to what this means for ethics in PR courses, one academic noted:

> It is about the synergies. Although media law focuses a lot on defamation and etc., which is very much relevant to journalism, we have a huge chunk of it focused on PR and strategic communications, which is relevant to our key focus.

The second research question examined how teaching ethics prepares students for the workplace in Singapore.

Seeds Sown in Universities for Industry Practice

Interviewees said learning ethics in university prepares students to understand expectations in the workplace. One practitioner explained, "Ethics is important especially in today's world with the use of social media and the world being so porous, information just gets out there." The practitioner argued that with so much information generated daily, the lines between generating original content and borrowing content are blurred, which is when ethical practice is important. The practitioner noted:

> Previously, people did not share that much information or plagiarize, but today it is so easy to plagiarize content from

> anywhere. Especially those doing content development— they have to adopt ethical practices as well as practically everything else they do. It has always been about making sure that you are ethical and honest in your communication and that was always stressed.

Another practitioner argued the seeds of ethical practice must first be sown in universities, contending it is "especially important for some industries like medical PR. Although you can learn about the rules and regulations of the industry on the job, it is better to learn it in the universities." Given the changing communication landscape, students prepared by universities would be better able to manage challenges than those who are not. One practitioner noted, "We need a very strong ethical framework before going to work because work will challenge you on what is ethical or not. Ethics also teaches you critical thinking and you need that so much in this business." The practitioner argued that integrating ethics into different PR modules works better than teaching ethics in standalone courses so that students can see the relevance of ethics in all situations. The practitioner added:

> If you set up certain ethical frameworks: how to make an analysis, the top questions to ask yourself, elements to look at, and if you bring that framework back into other courses, that would be fantastic! I would encourage that! Having students apply the code or principles of ethics to case studies would be an effective way of teaching. This translates to learning what is taught in universities to the workplace.

Another practitioner noted that "there must be guidelines on what you can say and do. Every organization needs ethical practices in terms of social media content sharing." One practitioner explained that "Some of our clients require us to take ethics tests. Every year, we have to log onto a website, listen to an online lecture and take a quiz where we must get all

questions correct."

Limitations of Teaching Ethics

Interviewees argued that even if universities devised the best curriculum, preparing students on ethics in PR does have its limitations. One practitioner said, "It is a good course to have but you have practitioners who are naturally ethical and unethical. It is your character: are you an ethical person?" Another elaborated:

> Ethics is something that you can discuss; it is very hard for people to conform. It is again person-specific. Some have very strong morals and ethics; so even if you don't teach them a lot of ethics, they will not stray.

While another added that beyond the classroom, it was a constant reminder at the workplace to reinforce ethics:

> In the course of work with clients, you have access to confidential stuff, so the ability to keep things to yourself is very critical. There are situations where we are privy to certain things that most people within the client's organization do not even know about. I think it is good to constantly remind them that the trust factor is very crucial as there must be mutual trust between you and the client.

This extended to working with clients who are ethically-challenged. The practitioner noted, "Besides from the perspective of confidentiality, there are times where clients have questionable ethical issues, and you need to figure out how to manage that or [they] ask you to do certain things that may impact the business."

Given all these diverse views, how can ethics be institutionalized so that minimum standards are kept? One academic suggested:

> Every practitioner should have a sense of ethics. When we talk about ethics in Singapore specifically, we need to, in some way, standardize . . . we need a yardstick, whether it is PRSA or IPRS. Ultimately, they have their own codes of conduct,

and practitioners need to, in a way, have some alignment to ethical background.

Discussion

Ethics in PR education is well-emphasized in most communication programs offered by Singapore's public universities. The subject is taught as a standalone course and is also integrated into several courses within their curricula. This demonstrates that ethics education conforms heavily to the CPRE's (2018) recommendations. Ethics could both be taught independently or emphasized and practiced in several writing and strategy-type courses. By integrating ethics into a practice-based course, students would have more opportunities to apply their knowledge before entering their internships or joining a new practice. In short, ethics education among local communication programs appears to have a healthy balance of learning and application and could be well situated at the rigorous end of the curriculum spectrum.

Teaching Ethics in Singapore as Compared to Other Countries

The mass communication and/PR curricula in Singapore is focused on imparting essential skills and knowledge on students as those contribute to students' employability as new PR practitioners. Local universities offer more courses that provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge they acquire, which also includes ethics. To a lesser degree, the Australian programs are also able to achieve this. However, the U.S. and U.K. programs appear highly theoretical. Data suggests that ethics/law are poorly emphasized in the U.K. programs in Singapore. A fair evaluation of the U.K. curricula was difficult to ascertain as course descriptions for two universities were unavailable for analysis. In essence, within Singapore's curricula, ethics appears well taught and integrated within the local universities' curricula, but the U.S. and U.K. programs appear to be attempting to meet basic expectations of a good program by offering an ethics course. In terms of ethics education, the Australian programs are

arguably more rigorous than their U.K. and U.S. counterparts.

The landscape appears to be different in the programs offered by the overseas universities. Although three of the four Australian programs have taught ethics as a standalone course at their home universities, findings indicate that ethics is not well-featured or integrated into the curricula taught in Singapore. This means the programs are likely to be situated in the middle of the spectrum whereby they partially-fulfill the CPRE's (2018) recommendations of providing a course in ethics with minimal and weak integration of ethics in other PR-related courses. Unlike their Australian counterparts, only one of the four U.K. universities in Singapore offering communication studies has a standalone ethics course and only one of the two U.S. programs featured ethics in its curriculum.

Among the local programs, ethics is integrated into several open and generic courses such as Organizational Communication, Ethics in Communication Management, Corporate Communication, and Corporate Responsibility in the Global Era, which bears some semblance to the Portuguese curricula (Gonclaves et al., 2013). Among the overseas programs, ethics is integrated into communication and media-related courses such as Radio News, Advertising: Research and Regulation, and Workplace Law, which appears to resemble the approach of programs in India (Chaisuwan, 2009). Thus far, ethics in PR education in Singapore seems to be of a pragmatic nature such that it allows for the application within the wide communications field.

One might argue that the differences between the PR programs in Singapore and its international counterparts are not significant. The differences are more evident between local universities and the overseas universities. Fitch (2013) argued that the curricula from overseas universities tend to be globalized rather than internationalized. Internationalization is where courses were "offered either through a partnership arrangement (with a local education institution or a

commercial operator) or at an international campus" and the curricula "seek(s) to relate abstract and general bodies of knowledge to local and foreign situations, reflecting the importance of social, political and geographical factors in education," while globalized universities are "generic or universal programs that are produced in one location for global consumption" (Fitch, 2013, pp. 137-138). The ramification of the globalized university would be that graduates would have difficulty applying knowledge to local problems and contexts, which would cause the local PR industry to question the relevance of PR education for employment and practice. The globalized nature of some overseas curricula lends to the perception that these programs are "cash cows" rather than designed to meet the needs of the students (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 646).

Beyond the Classroom: What is Learned Must be Reinforced in Industry

Chua and Ameen (2020) found that when confronted with ethical issues, students in Singapore universities are more likely to behave ethically, which could be a function of the education provided. This study argues that beyond awareness and discussions in the classroom, ethics has a utility function as it aims to equip practitioners to protect organizations' business needs and allow new practitioners to meet the expectations of practice and their role. This means ethics has a practical relevance and value because the additional critical thinking skills gained from ethics courses and the trust built with clients can translate into business and earnings for an agency.

Pang (2013) argues that practitioners are vital in helping to shape public perception and to manage the information vacuum in times of crisis. This involves managing the media as well as utilizing an integrated media approach (Pang et al., 2018). S. A. Bowen (2009) describes practitioners as "ethics counsel" (p. 271) for organizations, while Lee and

Cheng (2011) describe them as demonstrating ethical leadership.

Even though PR education is still largely about the skills and knowledge needed for practice, an exploration into ethics in varying forms has sown the seeds for future practice in several ways. First, practitioners would have stronger critical thinking skills, which are prized by employers and the industry (Landis, 2015; Mayer, 2016). Second, new practitioners are less likely to overestimate their ability to advise on ethical issues (Kim & Johnson, 2009; Todd, 2014) as they would have learned that carefully considering issues and making decisions with far-reaching impact is difficult. Third, new practitioners are less likely to avoid tackling ethical issues or defer decisions to their superiors (Curtin et al., 2011), which would strengthen the value and relevance of ethics and PR education for employment. Finally, the above would arguably culminate in new practitioners being less reliant on employers to provide further training in ethics, which addresses the industry's complaints of having to waste resources to train new practitioners (Tench & Fawkes, 2005).

Ethics taught in the classroom must be further cultivated and reinforced in the workplace (Bishop, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Shenkir, 1990). Carlson and Burke (1998) found shifts in thinking in adult students, from philosophical thinking to leadership action. Students employed analytical and conceptual skills to solve ethical dilemmas; were more at ease with uncertainty; developed an appreciation for limitations; and perceived the usefulness of managing ethics to affect organizational culture. This demonstrated that teaching ethics does have an effect on students and how PR is practiced.

With a foundation provided, the next steps of growth would likely come from examining case studies (Sparks & Cornwell, 1998) and experiential learning (Silverman et al., 2014). The CPRE (2018) recommends simulations (Neill, 2017; Silverman et al., 2014) and case studies (Neill, 2017; Silverman et al., 2014) aimed at building a strong

base of knowledge and skills (Garcia, 2010; Sriramesh, 2002). This favors a professional approach to PR education that is likely to be better received (Zhang et al., 2012).

Conclusion

This study examined the state of PR education in relation to how PR ethics is taught in Singapore and how teaching ethics prepares students for the workplace in Singapore. Findings suggest there are varying degrees in which ethics is offered by universities in Singapore, with a clear division between the local and overseas universities. Findings also suggest that industry practitioners find teaching ethics to be useful for the marketplace while recognizing that ethics cannot be imposed or instituted on the individual and must be left to the individual's prerogative.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the data were collected during the 2016-2017 academic year. Some of the curricula may have changed since that time; however, curricula generally do not undergo major changes quickly. Another limitation is that this study only examined degree-level PR curricula. Future studies could examine the diploma-level curricula of polytechnics and private education institutions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how ethics is taught and how these could form foundations for degree-awarding programs.

This study elucidated the state, relevance, and value of ethics in PR education in Singapore as well as the local industry's expectations of new practitioners. It is one of the few attempts at describing the state of PR education in this part of Asia and more specifically in Singapore. It is our expectation that this study will build on other studies to generate a repository of knowledge to understand less examined markets.

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No.3, 66-80

Teaching Brief

PR Ethics Literacy: Identifying Moral and Ethical Values Through Purposeful Ethical Education

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The topic of ethics should become a required element that is routinely explored in the communication classroom (Kolić Stanić, 2020). It is reported that "in the field of public relations, unethical practices have been regarded as a serious problem with numerous deleterious effects" (Ki et al., 2011, p. 267). This is not a desire that practitioners, educators, or scholars want to perpetuate (Taylor & Yang, 2015). Long has the profession suffered from labels including "PR hacks" and "spin doctors" and from professionals that merely push propaganda for the benefit of their organization to the detriment of the public. Using a case study as the model, this ethics assignment allows students to better understand the impact that sound ethical decisions can have on both the profession as well as the associated publics.

Keywords: ethics, literacy, moral code, public relations, case studies

Editorial Record: Special issue deadline June 15, 2020. Revision submitted September 4, 2020. First published online December 22, 2020.

Educators are encouraged to integrate ethics into the education of future public relations practitioners; however, before that can be achieved, a system of ethical PR literacy must be established. PR literacy is defined as identifying ethical viewpoints and understanding the ethical orientations of personal and situational experiences and allows for students to critically analyze, apply, and evaluate frameworks and principles for decision-making capacity. The exercise of teaching ethics and introducing ethical codes of conduct within the classroom has proven to discourage unethical behavior (Neill, 2019).

This ethics assignment utilizes the PURE model of ethical decision making, which includes a decision-making guide (Appendix) based on research by Kathy Fitzpatrick (2016). Per the Bivins and Kohlberg models of identifying moral obligations for PR practitioners, the highest stage of ethical development evolves from basic individual concern to a recognition of how the student's behavior impacts others (Luttrell & Ward, 2018). As students become more ethically literate, they have an increased understanding of the overlapping and underlying influence of their ethical behavior on others.

By leveraging case study methodologies, which promote a deeper understanding of an issue, students become increasingly invested in learning and take away a clearer appreciation of the ethical decision-making process (Gomm et al., 2000; Kolić Stanić, 2020). Krebs et al. (1997) studied performance factors for university students to test Kohlberg's model. In this study, the authors began work toward a new model of moral decision-making present in students as to uncover the implications for education. The authors discovered:

> a common thread runs through many of these implications: moral decisions and the cognitive structures that support them may serve many functions, which may vary with the types of dilemma people consider (e.g., hypothetical, real-life), their level of personal

> involvement and the contexts in which they occur. (Krebs et al., 1997, p. 142)

The use of case studies in a variety of fields can be applied to PR programs to prepare students for the multitude of ethical dilemmas that may need to be addressed over one's career. Krebs et al. (1997) further support the use of role-play to discuss the consequences or moral dilemmas that arise from self-interest and public-interest conflicts. This can sensitize students to the possibility that they will be better equipped to acknowledge the type of self-interest and justification that may evolve within a corporate or client structure and prepare the students to diffuse such issues.

The core competencies at the center of this exercise extend to a multitude of courses and the interchangeability of the cases for discussion can be customized to an instructor's individual classroom needs. The authors of this teaching brief have used a plethora of ethical dilemmas and case studies including The Flint Water Crisis, television anchor Leslie Roberts scandal, Alabama Human Life Protection Act, Sea World's Blackfish scandal, and the Founders Brewing Co. lawsuit. Any ethical problem could be substituted into this assignment and paired with the instructor's ethical model of choice. Depending on the instructor's preference, other ethical models could be applied in the same manner, including the ETHICS model developed by Thomson J. Ling and Jessica M. Hauck (2017), Kathy Fitzpatrick's Ethical Decision Making Guide (Fitzpatrick, 2016; Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001), Baker and Martinson's TARES Test (2001), or Kant's Decision-Making Model (Bowen, 2004). One of the many benefits of this assignment is the ability to customize both the case study as well as the ethical model.

The Ethics Assignment

Instructors should allow for two weeks to complete this assignment. Week one consists of in-class lectures, analysis, and

discussion of the ethical dilemma being analyzed; a brief background on the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) Code of Ethics; and how traditional ethical theories affect modern day practice including an examination of the ethics of consequences, ethics of duty, and ethics of character, and an overview of the PURE model of ethical decision making. In week two, students will complete the written application assignment. In this example, the authors have chosen to explore the topic of ethical implications within artificial intelligence (AI).

Objective

This assignment enables students to develop an understanding of principles of moral reasoning and ethical problem solving and decision-making. Learners will recognize the ethical responsibilities of practitioners and the social responsibilities of corporations and other organizations after completing this unit.

Procedures

Part 1/Week 1: Analysis and Discussion Surrounding the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence in PR

Class 1. During this initial class session, the instructor—leveraging lecture, journal articles, blog posts, and video clips—discusses some of the more challenging ethical principles within this scenario. This situation represents how PR practitioners must advocate for the ethical use of AI within the practice as well as with the organizations we work for or represent.

Class 2. Students are introduced to the PRSA Code of Ethics (Public Relations Society of America, n.d.) and the PURE model of ethical decision making along with the decision guide. It is imperative that students leave this session with a solid understanding of the selected code of ethics and how to apply ethics theory to present day ethical practices.

Background Materials. The PRSA Code of Ethics is a set of ethical guidelines that apply to members of PRSA, the world's largest and

foremost organization for PR professionals.

The PURE Model of Ethical Decision Making and Decision Guide. This model affords entry-level practitioners the opportunity to see how ethical decisions are grounded not just in the idea of public interest, which is too elusive to guide practice, but rather in theory, which provides them with a way of articulating how they arrived at their decisions.

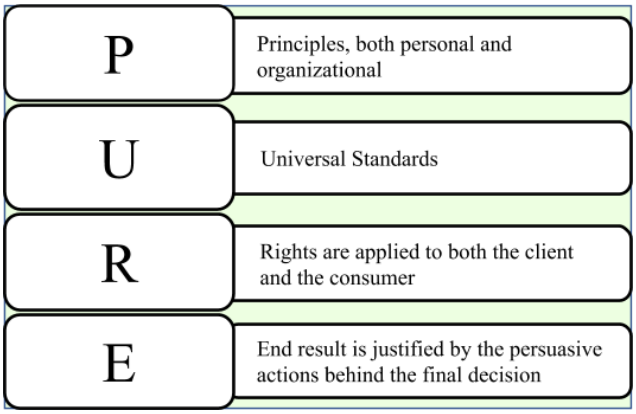

Figure 1. Diagram of the PURE Model of Ethical Decision Making (Luttrell & Ward, 2018)

Step One: Introducing the Ethical Dilemma

The use of AI has become more pervasive as brands have begun using technology to better identify, target, and connect with audiences. To that end, data and privacy issues are of great concern. Some areas explored include the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), chatbots that communicate with consumers and also collect and save their data unknowingly, and the 2019 Facebook announcement regarding the collection of millions of users' email addresses obtained without permission.

This ethical scenario provides strong points of discussion based on

privacy and legal implications as well as race. Researchers Nick Bostrom and Eliezer Yudkowsky (2014) developed this ethical dilemma, which is the foundation for this assignment:

> Imagine, in the near future, a bank using a machine learning algorithm to recommend mortgage applications for approval. A rejected applicant brings a lawsuit against the bank, alleging that the algorithm is discriminating racially against mortgage applicants. The bank replies that this is impossible, since the algorithm is deliberately blinded to the race of the applicants. Indeed, that was part of the bank's rationale for implementing the system. Even so, statistics show that the bank's approval rate for black applicants has been steadily dropping. Submitting ten apparently equally qualified genuine applicants (as determined by a separate panel of human judges) shows that the algorithm accepts white applicants and rejects black applicants. What could possibly be happening? (p. 316)

The first step of the PURE Model of ethical decision making is to follow your personal, organizational, and industry-specific principles. Individuals carry a personal moral code that guides their day-to-day decision-making abilities. To more robustly understand real-life moral judgments made by practitioners, we must attend to the functions that involve juggling multiple angles of perception for a PR professional.

Knowing that new PR professionals often rely on their personal morals to make decisions as their experience dealing with ethical dilemmas in the workplace is limited, we must fashion resolving hypothetical moral dilemmas in the classroom to improve future decision-making. Morals may include treating others the way you want to be treated, saying please and thank you, having respect for others, or simply showing compassion. Personal principles tend to be derived from surrounding influences (individuals and environments), including family,

friends, and co-workers as well as educational and religious institutions. While it is not always recognized, there is a distinction between morals and ethics. Morality focuses on internal values and beliefs. An individual's moral compass is generally a combination of learned and modeled behavior, while ethics involve a set of standards or codes that can develop and change over time depending on the situation or location.

Organizational principles that guide behavior should also be explored. This includes expectations regarding the treatment of clients, or the way information is communicated to the public. The final component of this step focuses on industry-specific principles serving as the collective conscience of the profession.

When determining if the response to a dilemma is ethical, students should consider whether any personal, organizational, or industry-specific principles have been compromised. Each decision will largely depend on an individual's personal principles as well as organizational and industry standards of operation. In the example provided in this assignment, one might ask students the moral responsibility of the PR practitioner that works at the bank or the ethical obligations of the app developer that created the automated loan application.

Given that human bias is inherent in AI algorithms (Silberg & Manyika, 2019), AI systems are only as good as the data that is fed to them and from which they learn. Left unchecked, the potential of undetected bias could uncontrollably increase as the AI accelerates. This is particularly true in cases where AI is devoid of or inconsistent in audits and remains largely unregulated. If this had been tested on the marginalized population's mortgage applications, the erroneous algorithm could have been avoided by better training the system with data that is fair and unbiased.

Practitioners must decide how to craft an ethical response for the public. Drawing on organizational and industry principles such

as transparency and honesty, as found in the PRSA Code of Ethics, it is important to divulge racial disparities in an algorithm's response. Once completed, it will likely make the public skeptical of any rejected applications, and relationships with the public will likely be tarnished. Each of these points alludes to a much larger discussion on how personal beliefs often lay the groundwork for ethical decision making.

In this step, students must begin to determine whether personal and organizational principles support the action.

Step Two: Ensuring the Ethical Principles are Applied without Exception

The second step is to ensure that the selected ethical principles are universal and are applied without exception. This step aligns closely with the beliefs of Immanuel Kant and his views on duty-based ethics (Kant & Gregor, 1998). According to Kant's Formula of Universal Law, an individual should "act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to become a universal law of nature" (Kant & Gregor, 1998, p. 39). In other words, principles must be applied to all individuals equally without exception.

According to Step Two, if one bank justifies the use of this type of algorithm, it must be justified across the board. Can a PR practitioner working in the banking industry justify the use of any type of artificial intelligence knowing that the bot mirrors human bias? Can the criteria of loan applications ever truly be applied across the board without exception? Students should think about the key messaging they would utilize in press releases, media interviews, social posts, etc., as well as how to provide reasonable reassurance in both the process and the monitoring of the AI to squash future issues before they impact people, through regular auditing and adjusting.

Step Three: Review the Practitioner's Values

The third step reviews whether the practitioner values the rights of

the public as well as their client. When examining this ethical dilemma, students are asked to examine how AI may be violating human rights. One might question personal versus professional priorities.

Here, PR practitioners need to reconcile the rights of the public with the rights of the organization. The company has a responsibility to improve the AI algorithm. That responsibility must be thoroughly articulated to the public, and practices need to be implemented so that the use of such systems are fair and equitable to all parties involved. PR's role is to communicate a solution that addresses the public's concerns over discrimination. This also highlights the bank's desire to make the application review process equitable.

Students will begin to investigate the importance of making ethical decisions that prioritize the public's interest. Doing so can help eliminate siloed decisions that have negative repercussions on those without a voice.

Step Four: Weigh the Desired Results Against Morally Questionable Decisions

In the final step, students will weigh the desired result against any morally questionable decisions or behavior required to attain it. As a tenant of consequentialism, the primary concern is the result. "When examining consequences in ethical advocacy, practitioners need to determine if the ends justify the means" (Luttrell & Ward, 2018, p. 61).

When discussing this ethical dilemma, the ends justify the means if the bank's response to finding out about the algorithm was to correct the problem and rereview all previous applications. As a result, the bank earned the trust of the public, saved time, and doubled mortgage applications. However, if none of this happened, the ends did not justify the means. Instructors should have students justify their beliefs and the impact of those beliefs from both sides of this issue. Students should have a thorough understanding of both the PRSA Code of Ethics and the PURE model of ethical decision making to appropriately apply ethical theory to

modern-day practices.

Part 2/Week 2: Applying the Decision-Making Guide

Once students have thoroughly discussed the case and applied appropriate codes of ethics using the PURE model of ethical decision making, they then fill out the decision guide and write an in-depth analysis which includes:

- Personal, organizational, and industry-specific principles;
- Universal principles of the case;
- Discussion on how the rights of the public and the client were handled; and
- Discussion on the justification of the end result.

Students present their findings to the class and discuss justification for their selection of specific material/content.

Assessment

Learning objectives for this assignment include assessing the student's ability to identify and apply theories related to navigating ethical dilemmas, to offer experiential and reflective opportunities for students so they can explore their personal values and ethical perspectives, and to provide students with the ability to make ethical recommendations based on issues faced in the profession. Grounded in cognitive theory, learning in this assignment incorporates the use of memory, repetition, motivation, critical thinking, and reflection (Griffin et al., 1994). This theory is dependent upon the instructor/student relationship. The instructor provides and leads the content to be learned (e.g., the case study, introduction of ethical models, the code of ethics), while the student decodes, interprets, and makes sense of the material (Almasseri & AlHojailan, 2019). The introduction of a framework, model, or theory paired with a current ethical dilemma or case study, is performed repeatedly throughout the semester to further connect theory to professional practice by presenting a multitude of moral theories and cases used to navigate ethical dilemmas. Therefore,

this assignment is repeated throughout the semester to reinforce concepts. Additionally, this assignment can be used effectively in courses where ethics is taught as a stand-alone module.

The 260 students that completed this assignment since it began being administered in 2015 were asked whether they were able to identify and apply theories related to the practice. A total of 251 students either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement (146 strongly agreed, 105 agreed). The remaining nine students selected either neutral or strongly disagree.

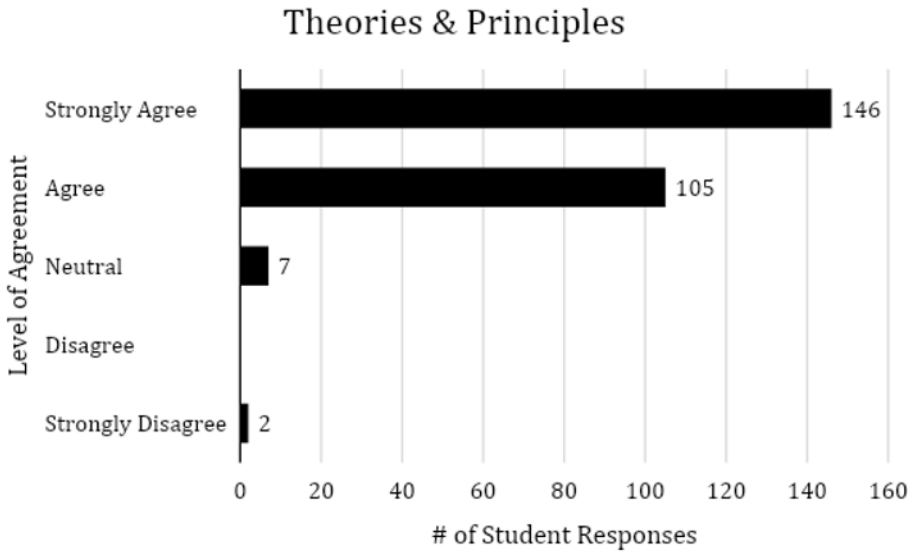

Figure 2. Student responses to whether the course and assignments "helped me to identify and apply theories to the practice."

Students were invited to discuss their rationale and overall observations. Many students commented that making ethical decisions was much more difficult than initially anticipated. "This assignment made me think about the different types of decisions I will have to make as a practitioner and how I will often have to guide others in ethical decision

making," noted one student. Another student commented that "before this class I would just make decisions based on what I thought was right. I never thought about why I was making them." Others said they appreciated being introduced to the models and theories in supporting their final decision, especially with a complicated topic. Some students expressed that they felt not all situations would need such a model to make an ethical decision.

As evidenced by the evaluation data, the majority of students felt that the lesson was impactful and welcomed the idea of *talking through* a decision-making process with the confidence of a team or group in the classroom. This assignment supports the research that the basis of transformative training of future PR specialists should include purposeful ethical education through varying media for the development of ethical and moral competence in a practitioner as an emerging young professional.

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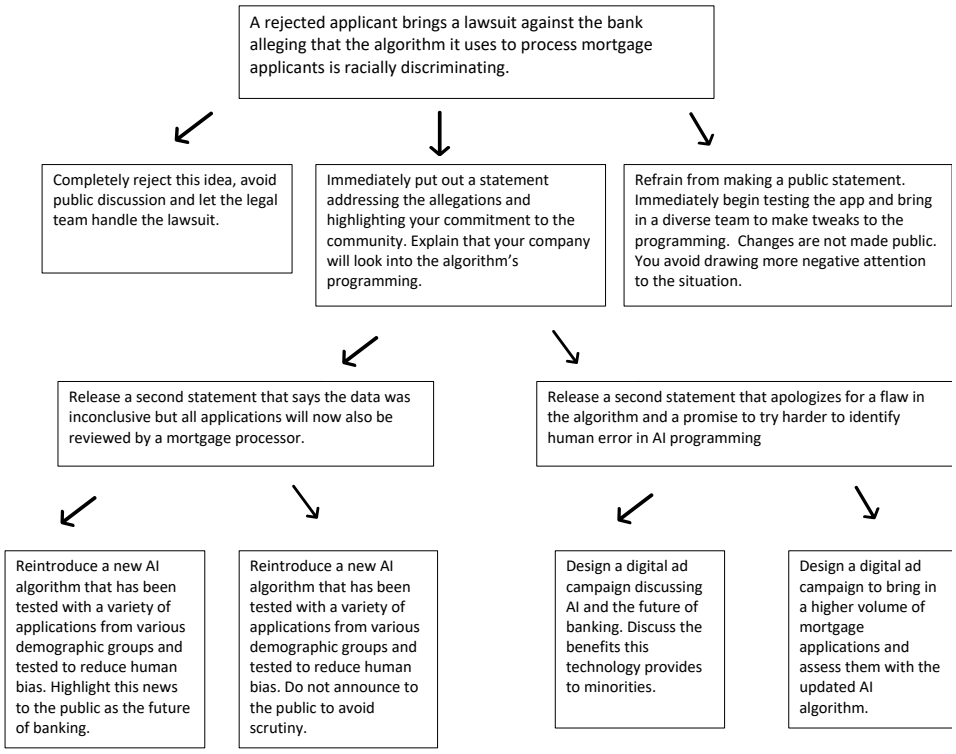
Appendix



Following Kathy Fitzpatrick's six steps, use the decision guide and answer the following questions:

"1. Define the specific ethical issue/conflict.
2. Identify internal/external factors (e.g., legal, political, social economic) that may influence the decision.
3. Identify key values.
4. Identify the parties who will be affected by the decision and define the public relations practitioner's obligation to each.
5. Select the ethical principles to guide the decision-making process.
6. Make a decision and justify it."

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No.3, 81-96

Teaching Brief

Finding a Linkage Between Becoming an Ethical Practitioner and Making an Organization Socially Responsible

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This article describes how ethical frameworks were incorporated into a master's degree program's strategic communication course in Australia. Students were given three assignments. In the first assignment, students applied three different ethical frameworks to guide an organization in ethical decision making and devised communication messages for stakeholders that were in line with each ethical framework. In the second assignment, students created a corporate social responsibility proposal for their selected organization. In the final assignment, students discussed the role of communication practitioners in ethical decision making and corporate social responsibility. Although the overall design of this course was useful in facilitating student learning in the areas of public relations ethics and CSR, it was a challenge to ensure the same or a higher quality level of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: consequentialism, corporate social responsibility, deontology, ethical decision making, relativism, sustainability

Editorial Record: Special issue deadline June 15, 2020. Revision submitted September 19, 2020. First published online December 22, 2020.

Organizations often encounter ethical challenges. How they deal with those challenges affects their performance and even their survival. It is crucial for organizations to have an ethics counsel who can guide them to make ethical decisions. While communication professionals are expected to act as a corporate conscience (Pompper, 2015), the majority of practitioners are arguably not prepared to counsel management on ethical dilemmas their organizations face.

As boundary spanners, communication professionals are "dual representatives" (Holtzhausen, 2014, p. 31). Practitioners listen to both management and publics' interests and try to narrow the gap between each side's position on certain issues (Holtzhausen, 2014). It is crucial not only to respect the differences between both the organization and its publics, but also to ensure that the practitioner's voice is not marginalized (Holtzhausen, 2014). Instead of using communication purely for promotion (i.e., communicating to promote the organization's image), communication professionals can help organizations become authentic by matching the organization's communication with actions (Pompper, 2015).

Accordingly, communication practitioners play a crucial role in guiding organizational leaders to act ethically (Pompper, 2015). They also help organizations plan and implement meaningful corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability programs. More importantly, an organization's ethical behavior can form a basis of trust in organization relationships (Bowen et al., 2016) and can enhance organizational effectiveness (Bowen, 2008). Despite this, the training of public relations students and professionals around ethical decision making and behavior is deficient.

To address this issue, the author developed three assignments that asked master's level students in a strategic communication course in Australia to (1) critically analyze a case using three ethical frameworks, (2) devise a CSR campaign, and (3) discuss the linkage between becoming

an ethical practitioner and making an organization socially responsible and ethical. The following is a review of the literature that guided the assignments' development.

Literature Review

Ethics in Public Relations

Public relations has been considered a normative practice that promotes dialogue and mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and publics (Bowen et al., 2016). Notably, Bowen et al. (2016) conceptualized ethics as a precursor for organization-public relationships. Numerous studies have emerged to explain ethical public relations practices such as dialogic communication (e.g., Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014), an ethical framework for advocacy (Edgett, 2002), the role of ethics in communication program evaluation (Place, 2015), the moral development of public relations practitioners (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009), and Millennials' approaches to ethical decision making (Curtin et al., 2011). Together, these studies have progressed our understanding of ethical decision-making and behaviors in the communications field.

Ethical frameworks can help organizations assess ethical issues before they make decisions that affect themselves as well as their stakeholders. Several scholars have incorporated ethical frameworks into public relations research to better understand consumers' reactions to organizations' behaviors (e.g., Xu & Ma, 2016). Across ethical frameworks such as deontology, consequentialism, and relativism, deontology has been studied most extensively in public relations (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013).

Deontology suggests that an action may be considered moral or immoral regardless of its consequences (Krishna et al., 2018). As such, evaluating ethicality using deontology involves the consideration of moral obligations (Velasquez, 2011). Deontology puts forward the case that there

are things we should not do even if it is to maximize utility. In contrast, consequentialist principles draw from teleological theories where behavior is considered morally right "only if it produces for all people a greater balance of good over bad consequences than other available alternatives" (Hunt & Vasquez-Parraga, 1993, p. 79). This consequentialist approach involves a benefit-harm assessment by which the decision makers need to calculate whether the benefits to stakeholders outweigh the harm (Tilley, 2005). Ethical relativism, comparatively, is based on a view that ultimately there are no right or wrong decisions, and ethical judgments are dependent on an individual's culture, society, or personal feelings (DesJardins, 2014).

In addition to the aforementioned frameworks, several models for ethical decision making have also been proposed in the literature. For example, Bowen (2005) puts forward an ethical decision making model in issue management; Tilley (2005) suggests an ethics pyramid to integrate ethical intent, means, and ends; Bivins (1992) proposes a system model for ethical decision making; and van Dijk et al. (2012) support a virtues perspective. This diverse range of ethical frameworks and models were presented to the students in this course to guide their own decision-making across the three assignments.

CSR and Public Relations

Although several scholars have attempted to define CSR, there is still no consensus on the definition of the concept (Dahlsrud, 2008). As identified by Votaw (1972) almost 50 years ago, "corporate social responsibility means something, but not always the same thing to everybody" (p. 25). This sentiment is still prevalent today with CSR being associated with many terms such as corporate citizenship, corporate social value, and strategic philanthropy. Within this literature, two concepts, CSR and sustainability, are crucial in the instructional setting for this teaching brief.

CSR is widely considered part of a business' ethical practices

(Park & Kang, 2020). The concept can be generally defined as corporations' efforts to meet the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities expected by stakeholders (Maignan, 2001). Some recent examples of CSR campaigns include Unilever's "Farewell to the forest" and Samsung's "Bring light to Ethiopia" (Oprea, 2020). Through the campaign, Unilever publicly established its goal to protect one million trees in Brazil and Indonesia by 2020 (Oprea, 2020). Samsung on the other hand, has partnered with the Korea International Volunteer Organization to provide solar-powered lanterns to areas where electricity is scarce (Oprea, 2020). Both examples highlight ways in which these organizations are contributing to their CSR efforts.

The concept of sustainability has similar definitional challenges as CSR. For instance, the phrase sustainable communities has emerged from scholars and practitioners in environmentalism who have begun to promote the ideas of pro-environmental changes to redress the negative environmental and social impact of economic growth and development in cities and communities (Portney, 2005). Today, sustainability is generally understood as a strategy to pursue ecological health, social equity, and economic welfare. This interpretation requires a long-term perspective and commitment to the well-being of current and future generations. As many current CSR practices strive to implement the concept of sustainable development, the term corporate sustainability is used as a sustainability-driven, sub-concept of CSR (Kleine & von Hauff, 2009).

While CSR skepticism exists (Rim & Kim, 2016), it is generally accepted among businesses that their operations have consequences on society, stakeholders, and the environment. As such, many organizations strive to implement CSR and sustainability programs to reduce their negative impact and create a positive impact on society and the environment while meeting their economic goals. Daniella Foster, senior director of corporate responsibility at Hilton, said, "sustainable and

inclusive growth is good business and the companies that have aligned their business growth strategies to their ethics will be a step ahead in future-proofing their business" (McPherson, 2019, para. 9).

Pompper (2015) argues that communication professionals play a crucial role in making organizations socially responsible and sustainable. Pompper (2015) highlights that communication professionals perform an insider-activist role in navigating CSR and sustainability. While working as an ethical counselor for their organization, Pompper (2015) notes that communication professionals need to advocate for stakeholders' interests throughout the organization's decision-making process in order to develop optimal CSR and sustainability programs for their organizations.

Ethical Frameworks and CSR

Ethical frameworks provide a way for us to understand what drives different individual's decision-making and behaviors and can be applied to organizational programs such as CSR. For example, parts of CSR programs such as fulfilling social responsibilities can be interpreted as an organization's moral duty to society under the deontological framework. However, considering the consequences of an organization's behavior on society or the environment aligns with a consequential view. In the course, students are expected to contemplate to whom, why, and how organizations should be socially responsible and utilize these ethical frameworks to guide their critical thinking.

Strategic Communications Course Assignment

About the Course

The course presented in this teaching brief is mandatory for students completing a master's degree in strategic communication at a university in Australia. At the beginning of the semester, students discussed barriers to ethical communication practices. Students were introduced to different ethical frameworks, such as deontology, consequentialism, and relativism and several models for ethical decision

making, such as the system model (Bivins, 1992), ethics pyramid (Tilley, 2005), and virtues perspective (van Dijk et al., 2012). By learning about different ethical perspectives, students were expected to understand the significance of ethics in communication practices.

In the second half of the semester, students were required to create a CSR proposal for a selected organization. Through this task, students learned to adapt to stakeholder expectations to maintain a social licence and ensure sustainability. Students also learned about project management tools, such as scheduling, budgeting, and measuring effectiveness.

Learning Outcomes

By completing this course, students are able to (a) critically evaluate ethical issues in managing public communication, (b) apply theories and technical skills to develop and implement solutions to ethical challenges, and (c) explore the parameters of corporate social responsibility.

Classroom Activities

In the first four weeks of the semester, students were given ethics case studies from the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA, n.d.) to review. Students were asked to identify ethical issue(s) and factors that may affect ethical decision making in the case studies as well as the publics who may be affected by the decisions. Students then selected ethical principles to guide the decision-making process before finally making a decision. In Week 4, a four-hour workshop was held. Starting with an introduction about ethics, four different ethical frameworks—deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics, and relativism—were described, and the pros and cons of each framework were discussed. Following this lesson, students worked in groups to discuss and apply each framework to a case study.

In the latter half of the semester, students learned about CSR and its relevant concepts, such as sustainability and Corporate Shared Value

(CSV) followed by communication campaign elements. This allowed the students to devise a CSR campaign. Each week, students were required to complete a task, such as a situation analysis, stakeholder mapping, or brainstorming strategic directions for their CSR campaign.

Assignments and Rubrics

A total of three assignments were designed for this course. The first assignment was a written critical case study analysis that was an individual assignment worth 30% of a total grade. The second assignment was a CSR and sustainability proposal, which was a group assignment (30%) that was accompanied by a peer evaluation (10%). The third assignment consisted of two parts: online participation (15%) and reflection (15%), both individual assignments.

In writing a critical case study analysis (Assignment 1), students analyzed and evaluated an assigned case by applying three ethical frameworks (i.e., deontology, consequentialism, and relativism) and recommended ethical decision-making models and communication strategies (See Table 1 for Assignment 1 Rubric).

Table 1: *Rubrics for Assignment 1*

Criteria	Weight (%)
Effectiveness and appropriateness of application of concepts and theories applied	30
Validity of issue and stakeholder identification and strategic recommendations	25
Organization and clarity of presentation	20
Depth of engagement with academic literature	25

Working in groups, the second assignment required students to write a CSR and sustainability proposal for their selected organization (Assignment 2). This proposal needed to include a situation analysis,

a review of the organization's previous CSR and sustainability efforts, the publics' perception of the organization, a competitor analysis, public identification, recommended CSR strategies and tactics, a budget, a timeline, and an evaluation. In conducting a situation analysis, primary research methods, such as surveys or interviews, were required (See Table 2 for Assignment 2 Rubric).

Table 2: *Rubrics for Assignment 2*

Criteria	Weight (%)
Effectiveness and appropriateness of concepts and theories applied	30
Validity of strategic recommendations	30
Team collaboration in the development of communication strategies	25
Professional standard report layout, including budget, timeline, and breadth of referencing	15

The third assignment was split into two parts. Students participated in online activities weekly via an online learning platform (Assignment 3A). The online activities ranged from a discussion of short case studies to completing polls. The students' online contribution needed to reflect consideration of the lecture content and critical engagement with the weekly readings. Students also needed to acknowledge and respect their peers' different perspectives.

Finally, students were required to write a 1,000-word reflection on the linkage between becoming an ethical communications practitioner and making an organization ethical and socially responsible (Assignment 3B). The following guiding questions were given to students: What are the roles of a communication practitioner?; Why is an organization's ethical decision-making important?; How do ethical orientations help?; Why

should an organization be socially responsible?; and How does being an ethical practitioner relate to making the organization socially responsible? (See Table 3 for Assignment 3 Rubric).

Table 3: *Rubrics for Assignment 3*

Criteria	Weight (%)
Assignment 3A: Academic coherence of contribution	10
Assignment 3A: Evidence of critical engagement with lecture content and readings	15
Assignment 3A: Reflection and acknowledgement of the diversity in members' different perspectives	15
Assignment 3A: Pertinence of independently sourced (and/or original) contributions beyond subject-specific content	10
Assignment 3B: Depth of engagement with academic literature	20
Assignment 3B: Depth of reflection and insights	20
Assignment 3B: Structure, referencing and clarity of expression	10

Discussion and Conclusion

Through teaching this course, the author observed students gradually develop an understanding about ethical frameworks and how to apply these to case studies. In the course, students were first given PRSA ethics case studies before being asked to apply deontology, consequentialism, and relativism to cases prepared by the instructor. While some students were able to develop their logic and reasoning from the case studies provided, other students found ethical frameworks difficult to

understand and apply. Thus, more case studies should be made available online for students to practice and better understand the application of ethical frameworks.

In the second half of the semester, students enjoyed devising the CSR campaign proposal. However, understanding CSR concepts varied among students. The instructor provided general guidelines and expectations that CSR as pet projects or corporate propaganda were to be avoided, and partnerships that contributed to both society and to the organization were encouraged. However, even though a warning was given from the instructor that CSR should not be used as a crisis management strategy for an image management purpose, some students still considered CSR as part of impression management or as a response to a crisis.

There are three key lessons learned from teaching this course. First, students found it challenging to link the role of public relations professionals to ethical decision making and to demonstrate a professional skill set when they may have never worked in the industry. However, when students were given enough opportunities to apply each ethical framework to several cases, the majority were able to do so. This issue also arose when students were asked to devise three different communication messages that reflected their analysis of the three different ethical frameworks. As such, the author identified that, to some extent, it is helpful to provide examples of how communication messages can be created. If students had taken a media writing course before taking this course, it would have created more synergetic effects on their learning outcomes.

Second, while the role of communication practitioners was highlighted throughout the semester, some of the concepts were considered vague by students who did not have professional experience. Of note, the idea of being a boundary spanner who should find a way

to make an organization act ethically even if the decision is not in the organization's best interest (Holtzhausen, 2014) was challenging for some students to grasp. As a result, they had difficulty understanding the reason why communication professionals are involved in devising CSR programs and how being an ethical practitioner is related to making his/her organization ethical. Using multimedia content to provide examples via online learning platforms was helpful in addressing this issue.

Finally, the author felt that more effective facilitation of online learning is needed for teaching this course in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the author and many other lecturers around the world an opportunity to think about how to better facilitate online learning. The author sought a way to redesign this course's online learning platform to encourage students' participation in online discussions on ethics and CSR that would actually give opportunities for them to apply their learning from the readings to practice. As a result, the author implemented online participation as a weekly activity that students needed to work on before coming to class. Through feedback, students told the author that the online activities were not overwhelming and rather helpful for their understanding. In the future when a hybrid mode of learning (i.e., mix of asynchronous and synchronous learning) will become the new normal, it will be crucial to create an online learning environment that allows students to have a better learning experience. The platform the author's institution uses allowed her to test various functions from online discussions to peer feedback. Although the author felt that the overall design of this course was useful in facilitating student learning in the areas of public relations ethics and CSR, it was a challenge to ensure the same level of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No.3, 97-104

Teaching Brief

PR Ethics: Choose Your Own Adventure

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Rationale

The 2018 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) report *Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State. Educators and Practitioners* recommends that all public relations programs require an ethics course in their curriculum. To prepare students for ethical challenges they may face in the profession, the CPRE report also recommended that "ethics lessons and courses should incorporate moral philosophy, case studies, and simulations to be the most effective" (p. 68). It further recommends that "using classical ethical knowledge and applying it critically to modern public relations challenges will equip future practitioners to thrive in an environment of fake news, high levels of mistrust, management scandals, and public scrutiny of information sources" (p. 68).

Inspired by the popular *Choose Your Own Adventure* books of the '80s and '90s, "PR Ethics: Choose Your Own Adventure" asks students to develop a web-based interactive story based on a PR ethics case study. Students choose one ethics case study from PRSA to adapt into an interactive narrative using Typeform's interactive fiction template. Once they have completed their interactive story, they will deliver a presentation

Editorial Record: Special issue deadline June 15, 2020. Revision submitted August 27, 2020. First published online December 22, 2020.

that applies their work to the PRSA Code of Ethics, the Page Principles, and the theory of Utilitarianism.

Through this assignment, students are put in the position of imagining a (real life or fictionalized) scenario, identifying ethical dilemmas, making clear decisions, and planning for a variety of outcomes and conclusions. Through the creation of an interactive story, students identify choices that lead to different outcomes, applying logic and predictive decision making to identify consequences of action or inaction, and make connections between theory and practice.

"PR Ethics: Choose Your Own Adventure" is an easily adaptable activity for ethics courses that provides a framework for the discussion and/or analysis of any of the following topics: codes of ethics, crisis and ethics, digital ethics, transparency, corporate social responsibility, diversity, ethical cultures, writing and ethics, global ethics, and more. This assignment can be made to fit any PR course by changing the topic of the case study and adding topic-specific assigned readings. This assignment can be done individually or as a group and is suitable for online or face-to-face course instruction.

Student Learning Outcomes

Note: most outcomes correspond with those found in the CPRE *Ethics Education Report* (Bortree et al., 2019).

- Identify ethical issues in communication situations.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the major ethical approaches that affect moral decision making by organizations as well as the role of public relations professionals in shaping those decisions.
- Analyze the conflicting duties and loyalties in ethical issues that public relations practitioners and organizational leaders confront.
- Construct written and oral arguments explaining particular ethical choices.
- Develop critical thinking and analytical problem-solving skills

to address ethical issues using ethical decision models.

- Understand the broader impact of ethical decision making.
- Familiarize students with the PRSA Code of Ethics, Page Princples, and ethical guidelines to aid in decision making.

Connection to Public Relations Practice

In our ever-changing media landscape, public relations practitioners face ethical challenges and dilemmas daily. CPRE's 2018 report states:

> Public relations practitioners and students need to be prepared to address a range of ethical issues including transparency, truthfulness, digital ethics, and decision-making. Greater education on ethics and a model to help with ethical decision-making will help prepare the next generation to work in an environment that does not always value truth. Students need to be vigilant about information they consume as well as information they create and disseminate. This is the role of public relations education. (p. 66)

Data from the report also suggest that both educators and practitioners identify ethics knowledge as critical for new practitioners (CPRE, 2018).

This assignment connects ethical frameworks (Utilitarianism) and professional codes of ethics (PRSA Code of Ethics and the Page Principles) to real-life public relations practices.

Assessment

Student learning will be assessed using the rubric below.

Choose Your Own Ethics Adventure Story And Presentation Rubric

Name:

Case:

Story identifies the ethical issue(s), internal/external factors, and stakeholder groups that would be impacted by the case and includes them throughout the story.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Story includes scenarios that are realistic and based on different ethics-based decisions.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Story is based competently on information, ideas, or insights from the textbook, ethical theories, PRSA Code of Ethics, Page Principles, and PRSA's Ethical Decision-Making Guide.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Story is realistic, logically organized, and clear. The story makes sense and is easy to follow.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Story includes at least 20 decisions to guide decision-making. Scenarios contain choices that illustrate the different ethical sides.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Presentation: did not read notes, appeared confident, clearly prepared, and practiced ahead of time. Knowledgeable about the case and spoke the full time.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Presentation accurately identifies and explains all PRSA Member Code of Professional Values, PRSA Code Provisions of Conduct, and Page Principles that apply to the story.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong

Presentation accurately identifies and analyzes the conflicting duties and loyalties confronted by public relations practitioners and organizational leaders in ethical situations.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Presentation accurately explains how ethical frameworks (Utilitarianism and PRSA Ethical Decision-Making Guide) were used to create the story.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong
Presentation contains a solid argument for the most ethical decisions and describes in detail five key take-aways learned about applied public relations ethics and ethical decision making in the creation of the story.	1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Strong

Total Points: /50

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

This assignment was created to align with the stated learning goals found in the *Ethics Education Report* (Bortree et al., 2019). Outcomes will be evaluated following deployment of the assignment in the fall.

I expect students to report that this assignment helped them develop critical thinking and analytical problem-solving skills to address ethical issues and that it helped them understand the broader impact of ethical decision making. My expectation is that students will successfully identify ethical issues in communication situations, but may fail to recognize the more nuanced ethical complexities of professional life due to lack of experience.

I expect students will demonstrate an understanding of the major ethical approaches that affect moral decision making by organizations as

well as the role of public relations professionals in shaping those decisions through the creation of this assignment and corresponding presentation, which will help them construct written and oral arguments explaining particular ethical choices.

Students may struggle to analyze the conflicting duties and loyalties in ethical issues that public relations practitioners and organizational leaders confront, again because they lack experience in the professional field. They may also have trouble discerning between an ethical dilemma and a legal issue.

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Appendix

Assignment: *PR Ethics: Choose Your Own Adventure*

Inspired by the popular *Choose Your Own Adventure* books of the ‘80s and ‘90s, you are asked to develop a web-based interactive story based on a PR ethics case study. You will choose one ethics case study from PRSA to adapt into an interactive narrative using Typeform’s interactive fiction template. Once you have completed your interactive story, you will deliver

a presentation that applies your work to the PRSA Code of Ethics, the Page Principles, and the theory of Utilitarianism.

This assignment asks you to imagine a scenario, identify ethical dilemmas, make clear decisions, and plan for a variety of outcomes and conclusions. Through the creation of your interactive story, you will identify choices that lead to different outcomes, apply logic and predictive decision making to identify consequences of action (or inaction), and make connections between theory and practice.

Directions:

1. Read:
    - "Ethics and Law in Public Relations" (Chapter 3), from *Introduction to Strategic Public Relations* (Page & Parnell, 2018)
    - PRSA Code of Ethics
    - Page Principles
    - PRSA's Ethical Decision-Making Guide
2. Choose one PRSA ethics case study: https://www.prsa.org/about/ethics (Note to instructor: alternatively, students can be provided with real PR cases like Tylenol, BP oil spill, etc.).
3. Use PRSA's Ethical Decision-Making guide as a springboard to identify the ethical issue(s), internal/external factors, and stakeholder groups that would be impacted by your case. Brainstorm scenarios that could take place based on different ethics-based decisions. https://www.prsa.org/docs/default-source/about/ethics/ethics-case-studies/ethics-case-study-ethical-desision-making-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=8a55268f_4
4. Using Typeform's Interactive Fiction template, create a choose-your-own-adventure story based on your case. You must include at least 20 decisions as part of your story. https://www.typeform.com/templates/t/interactive-fiction/

5. Once your story is complete, you will create and deliver a presentation that applies your work to the PRSA Code of Ethics, the Page Principles, and the theory of Utilitarianism found in Chapter 3. Your presentation must be at least 10 minutes long and should directly identify the following:

- All PRSA Member Code of Professional Values that apply to your story
- All PRSA Code Provisions of Conduct that apply to your story
- All Page Principles that apply to your story
- How you used ethical frameworks (Utilitarianism and PRSA Ethical Decision-Making Guide) to create your story
- What you learned about ethics and ethical decision making in the creation of your story

Sample: Screenshots of the beginning of an interactive choose-your-own-adventure story using Typeform.com based on a PRSA ethics case study can be seen at: https://www.arienrozelle.com/teaching-resources

Journal of Public Relations Education
2020, Vol. 6, No. 3, 105-110

A Practical Guide to Ethics in Public Relations

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A Practical Guide to Ethics in Public Relations
Authors: Regina M. Luttrell and Jamie Ward
Rowman & Littlefield, 2018
ISBN: 9781442272743
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695818797495

The Commission on Public Relations Education's (2018) *Fast Forward* report recommended colleges and universities require an ethics course for undergraduate public relations majors distinct from media law and media ethics classes. A year later, the *Ethics Education Report* (Bortree et al., 2019) proposed learning outcomes and topics that a stand-alone public relations ethics course should cover.

Although the *Ethics Education Report* (Bortree et al., 2019) doesn't list Luttrell and Ward's book as a recommended text, *A Practical Guide to Ethics in Public Relations* covers most proposed topics, including decision-making approaches, ethics codes, loyalties, digital challenges, corporate social responsibility, and crisis communication. It also addresses the Report's 10 learning outcomes such as the ability to create a personal ethics code, analyze competing duties, identify ethical problems, and defend ethical decisions.

There's another reason to pick up the appropriately named *A Practical Guide to Ethics in Public Relations.*

Textbooks very often are passive vehicles for pushing content. Luttrell and Ward take a different approach, incorporating brief cases within each chapter to help students become active readers who answer

questions and apply concepts as they go.

Eight of the nine chapters begin with a public relations ethics expert Q&A. The four women and four men answer the same seven questions about needed ethical skills, potential for competing loyalties and other dilemmas, and what ethical challenges entry-level practitioners should anticipate. Although there is a gender balance, other elements of diversity are not as evident.

The first two chapters provide ethics foundations and theories for use in the profession. In Chapter 1, the authors define ethics and professional values and show how public relations has evolved from manipulative spin to a profession that generally values public service more than self-service. They also describe philosophical approaches including utilitarianism, categorical imperatives, libertarianism, and virtue ethics that can guide reason-based decision-making. Readers are encouraged to develop a personal code of ethics and "see where your beliefs fit with other ethical theorists" (p. 21).

Chapter 2 introduces readers to ethics codes for public relations and the allied fields of marketing and journalism and poses a series of questions for code comparison. The authors further point out that code provisions can compete and do not provide ***the*** answer to the types of ethical dilemmas public relations practitioners face.

Chapters 3-8 each tackle a PRSA Code of Ethics professional value: advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness. Finally, chapter 9 includes five award-winning Arthur W. Page Society Competition case studies for discussion and analysis. All chapters discuss the ethical implications and complexities of social media use.

Interspersed in the chapters are familiar ethical decision-making models: the Potter Box, the TARES Test, Sherry Baker's five baselines for ethical advocacy, Ruth Edgett's 10 criteria for desirable advocacy, and Frank Navran's six-step model.

Luttrell and Ward also introduce their own PURE ethical decision-making model, designed to help entry-level practitioners "apply a multitude of theories and easily assess outcomes" (p. 59). Decision-makers begin by identifying personal and organizational **Principles**, followed by an assurance that these principles are also **Universal** standards. Third, practitioners should value the **Rights** of the client as well as stakeholders. Lastly, they must ethically justify the recommended **End Result**. They utilize the PURE model to guide case assessments throughout the text.

While many cases are obviously right vs. wrong situations (e.g., Hill & Knowlton's misinformation campaign to garner public support for the 1990s Iraq War and Justine Sacco's racist tweet), others reflect real-world dilemmas: whether to be a ghostwriter, Germany's campaign to lead pedophiles to treatment, and the challenges PAO Paula Pedene faced blowing the whistle on Phoenix VA leaders.

One area to expand is public relations' ethical responsibilities surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion—a content topic recommended in the *Ethics Education Report* (Bortree et al., 2019). Additionally, the Commission's *Diversity and Inclusion Report* (2019) highlights the need to "incorporate discussion of racial and gender differences in the public relations industry in all major courses" (p. 3). Articles and studies refer to our profession's ongoing challenge to include diverse voices (e.g., Johnson, 2018; Landis, 2019; "Millennials," n.d.; Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Simpson, 2018), so textbooks that explicitly encourage these conversations will better prepare students for their future in public relations.

A Practical Guide to Ethics in Public Relations is not devoid of diversity and inclusion content, however. Chapter 9 lists ethics resource links to the National Black Public Relations Association and Hispanic Public Relations Association, and Chapter 2 includes ethics codes from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the United Kingdom and the

Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa. Case study 3 in chapter 9 presents the Starbucks Race Together Initiative.

There are areas where diversity references could be expanded. For example, the discussion of Rawls' veil of ignorance refers to the gender wage gap; factoring in gaps (wage and otherwise) facing people of color, those with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, among others, would strengthen essential discussions and lay foundations to build a more-diverse profession. The discussion of the Flint Water Crisis could include practitioners' obligations to discuss institutional biases and power inequality. Similarly, the Justine Sacco case provides her perspectives but doesn't invite expert comment on larger racial and professional implications.

Additionally, it will be important for instructors to delineate Kohlberg's stages of moral development from ethical approaches of Mill, Kant, and others. While we may choose to make a decision based on consequences or duties, we do not get to select our stage of moral development. Additionally, Kohlberg's approach should be counterbalanced with Carol Gilligan's ethics of care to address potential gender differences.

In all, however, this is a valuable addition to a rather small pool of public relations ethics textbooks. Its active reading approach with plenty of case examples makes it appropriate for college undergraduates who have taken at least an introductory public relations course. And, importantly, it's affordable.

Keeping ethical obligations at the forefront of public relations practice is paramount to the success of the newest generation of professionals. *A Practical Guide to Ethics in Public Relations* gives students a leg up not only to prepare them for individual success but also to contribute to the collective realization of public relations as an ethically sound profession.

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