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Editorial Staff

Note from the Editor-in-Chief:
The first issue of 2021, provides a mix of topics including several articles which address diversity and intercultural competency, indirectly recognizing this continuing, urgent area where pedagogy can be examined and utilized. The issue reflects the work of both the outgoing and incoming editors.

As the incoming editor for the Journal of Public Relations Education, I've learned much – in addition to all the adjustments to teaching and learning in our pandemic-response world. To that end, our immediate past editor, Emily Kinsky, has been a saint – patient, responsive to my seemingly never-ending lists of questions, and, as always, focused on making sure we provide a forum for quality pedagogical research in public relations.

I'm not sure I can parallel the quantum leaps forward in the journal that she has made such as with adopting the on-line submission services, and that Chuck Lubbers made in kicking off the journal. We'll try. Any progress we make will be because of the stellar Executive Editorial Board. I am thankful to be able to tap the expertise of board members who joined the journal under Emily's leadership, with Melissa Janoske McLean now serving as Senior Associate Editor, and with LaShonda Eaddy, Kelly Vibber, and Brandi Watkins continuing in their roles. To the board we added Christopher McCullough as associate editor, helping manage the review process, and Stephanie Mahin, as associate editor of our Book and Resource Reviews. We've also created a Past Editors Council to serve as a sounding board as needed. We are also appreciative of our board members, who continue to provide feedback and reviews as well.

Journal of Public Relations Education
Editorial Review Board

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An Examination of Student Perceptions of Teacher Social Media Use in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Equipping students with knowledge, skills, and abilities in social media requires incorporating social media into communication classes. This study explores how teachers are adopting social media and the impact classroom adoption of social media is having on students' perceptions of their teacher's technological coolness and credibility. Survey data was collected from students at three U.S. universities. Data revealed using social media platforms that are not widely adopted in communication classrooms (i.e., Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, etc.) positively influences perceptions of technological coolness (originality and attractiveness) more than the mainstream social media platforms students are accustomed to teachers integrating into the curriculum (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter). Additionally, adopting non-mainstream social media platforms positively impacts teacher credibility (trustworthiness and goodwill) among students who use these platforms more frequently. Findings suggest students positively evaluate teachers who stay up-to-date on social media and experiment with newer platforms in their classes.

Keywords: Social media use, teacher credibility, technological coolness, pedagogy

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Public relations professors often talk about being models for students (e.g., Remund & Freberg, 2013). However, changes in communication technology (Daniels, 2018; USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019; The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, 2019; Wright & Hinson, 2017) and in the generational expectations of students (Kim, 2018) make it difficult for public relations educators to stay on top of new technology trends and simultaneously master them to the point that they can teach their students how to use them effectively. Nevertheless, public relations practitioners and academics recognize that new technologies, including social media, must now be an integral part of the public relations curriculum (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). In fact, The Commission on Public Relations Education's (2018) latest report on undergraduate education recommends that "as much as possible, technology tools should be incorporated into courses" (p. 94) in order to "equip students with the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to best serve the practice of public relations" (p. 85).

From a practitioner perspective, social media has widespread implications for organizations particularly in terms of organizational reputation (Agozzino, 2012; Floreddu et al., 2014). Social media is defined as "open source (i.e. publicly accessible) media sites on the internet that accept user-generated content and foster social interaction" (Stacks & Bowen, 2013, p. 30). Scholars have argued that public relations professionals view social media use as a means of credibility building, as well as a venue for sharing transparent and accurate information on behalf of clients (Wright & Hinson, 2012). As a result, how public relations professors teach up-and-coming professionals about social media may have a significant impact in social media use for the public relations industry. A variety of studies have been conducted to understand how public relations educators are using social media in their undergraduate classrooms (e.g., Ewing et al., 2018; Zhang & Freberg, 2018) from the instructors' perspective. Similar to research conducted by Tatone et al. (2017), this study examines students' perspectives about teacher adoption and use of social media for educational purposes. Specifically, this study assesses student perceptions of social media use in the classroom and the effect of those perceptions on how students evaluate teachers in terms of technological coolness and credibility to offer practical and theoretical implications as a means of informing social media pedagogy.

Literature Review

This study is situated at the intersection of social media classroom trends, teacher credibility, and the technological coolness literature.

Social Media Classroom Trends

In a national survey of higher education faculty (N = 7,969), Seaman and Tinti-Kane (2013) found respondents who reported using social media as a teaching tool (41%) lagged behind respondents' professional (55%) and personal (70.3%) social media use. Among the faculty respondents who used social media in their teaching, middle-aged faculty members, ages 35-54, had higher rates of using social media for teaching purposes than younger faculty (under 35). Additionally, faculty in the disciplines of arts and humanities as well as applied sciences used social media as a teaching tool at a higher rate than faculty in other disciplines. The most frequently used social media platforms for teaching were: (1) Blogs and wikis (26.9%), (2) podcasts (16.3%), (3) LinkedIn (11.1%), (4) Facebook (8.4%), and (5) Twitter (4.1%).

Seaman and Tinti-Kane (2013) explained lower adoption rates of social media in teaching is likely due to the concerns of faculty. Two of the top faculty concerns about these publicly accessible platforms included integrity of student submissions and privacy.

Researchers have observed similar trends among mass communication faculty. McCorkindale (2013) found that only a third of the public relations professors who had a Facebook or Twitter account used those social media platforms in their classes. She also reported public relations professors were divided about whether it was appropriate to become "friends" with students on Facebook or connect with students on Twitter because of concerns about professionalism and privacy. However, according to Kothari and Hickerson (2016), nearly three-quarters of journalism faculty said they used Twitter in the classroom, while 42% reported using Facebook, to teach students about recruiting sources, crowd-sourcing ideas and promoting stories.

Remund and Freberg (2013) suggested public relations professors should embrace the role of social connector as they prepare students for an increasingly interconnected, digital world. According to these scholars (Remund & Freberg, 2013), becoming a social connector requires professors to "[build] and [leverage] social networks to implement pedagogical methods much richer and dynamic than the traditional classroom experience" (p. 2). As a result, public relations professors must become active users of social media channels, model online reputation management, and facilitate collaboration between students and professionals.

Studies have evaluated the use of Twitter in public relations classrooms. Fraustino et al. (2015) conducted Twitter chat discussions and found that students reported learning about public relations concepts including professionalism, media influence, crisis communication, social media campaigns, and best practices. They also noted Twitter facilitated experiential learning because students were able to see learning as a process, as constructing and deconstructing knowledge and as conversation. Similarly, Tatone et al. (2017) tested Twitter use in a large lecture class. Subsequent focus groups with students revealed that using Twitter created a sense of classroom community and allowed them to learn from a variety of opinions. However, students also noted Twitter use during class could turn into a distraction because of the temptation to use their smartphones for non-academic purposes. Additionally, they noted this distraction sometimes caused some students to compete to be the most entertaining with their posts.

Teacher Credibility and Social Media

One of the most important concepts affecting the student-teacher relationship in the instructional literature is teacher credibility (Carr et al., 2013). Teacher credibility was originally derived from the rhetorical research on source credibility, which was defined as “the attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a communicator” (McCroskey & Young, 1981, p. 24). Building on this definition, scholars have defined teacher credibility as student attitudes toward a teacher that are based on observations of the teacher’s communication behavior (Schrodt et al., 2009; Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Also, researchers have identified three dimensions of teacher credibility: competence, trustworthiness and caring (DeGroot et al., 2015; McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Competence relates to the instructor’s perceived expertise in a given subject area. Trustworthiness describes a teacher’s perceived character and sincerity. Caring has been described as the degree to which an instructor shows concern for his/her students’ welfare.

Fin and colleagues’ (2009) meta-analysis found that teacher credibility was related to a variety of student learning outcomes and teaching behaviors. For instance, student learning outcomes that have been shown to be related to teacher credibility include enhanced motivation to learn and improved cognitive learning. Additionally, teaching strategies, such as affinity-seeking, and teaching behaviors, including immediacy, assertiveness and humor, also have relationships with teacher credibility. Interestingly, moderate technology use has been shown to increase teacher credibility (Schrodt & Turman, 2005; Schrodt & Witt, 2006).

With the proliferation of publicly accessible social media channels and their potential as learning and communication tools (Junco et al., 2011; Waters & Bortree, 2011), scholars have investigated the impact of instructors' use of these channels and its impact on teacher credibility. For example, Johnson's (2011) experimental study found that an instructor's Twitter profile with socially-oriented posts produced higher perceived teacher credibility among student participants than a profile with only scholarly posts. The results also showed perceptions of teacher credibility were moderated by students' level of comfort viewing a Twitter profile and whether students thought it was a good idea for a college professor to have a publicly accessible Twitter account. Her findings also showed that students were split on the question of whether professors should have a Twitter account that students can see. Those who thought it was a bad idea (47%) reported that the professor's account may display unprofessional content, it may eliminate social boundaries, and it might decrease students' respect for the professor. Those who felt that it was a good idea noted that the Twitter account could help the professor seem more approachable, more human, and up-to-date on the latest technology.

However, in a related experiment, DeGroot et al.(2015) reported students scored an instructor's Twitter profile higher on teacher credibility when the tweets were strictly professional. Additionally, they found students were more likely to give the instructor higher credibility ratings when the students thought it was a good idea for instructors to use Twitter. As a result, DeGroot and colleagues identified three core reasons a professor should use Twitter: (1) to extend the classroom; (2) to improve student–instructor relationships; and (3) to teach students how to use Twitter in a professional manner. They also provided two reasons professors should not have a public Twitter account: (1) It can violate typical classroom and time expectations, and (2) the boundaries between students and instructors might be broken down in a negative way.

McArthur and Bostedo-Conway (2012) conducted a study of student-instructor interaction on Twitter. They operationalized this interaction as the student-reported frequency of reading instructor tweets and writing their own tweets. They reported that student perceptions of teacher credibility were related to student frequency of Twitter use. They explained, “students did not perceive greater feelings of character, competence, or caring from instructors using Twitter unless they used Twitter themselves” (p. 289).

Technological Coolness in the Classroom

Research shows beliefs, attitudes and subjective norms lead to behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Bean & Eaton, 2000). Likewise, students’ perceptions of their educational environment, including perceptions of their teacher, play a pivotal role in how receptive students are to learning (Carr et al., 2013; McCormick et al., 2013). These perceptions also influence students’ educational satisfaction, learning outcomes and the educational path they choose (Finn et al., 2009; Schrodt et al., 2009).

One aspect of the educational environment is the technology instructors employ for teaching students. With public relations practitioners and scholars (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018) encouraging professors to stay up-to-date with and incorporate communication technologies, including social media, into the curriculum, it becomes increasingly important to understand the influence these technologies are having on perceptions of teachers. Current research about pedagogy in public relations does not specify the impact of teachers incorporating newer versus older forms of communication technologies in the classroom on student perceptions. In order to examine perceptions of teachers who adopt different types of social media channels, this study adopts the concept of coolness from the consumer marketing literature and applies it to student perceptions of teacher’s technology use.

While teachers don’t necessarily seek or even desire to be perceived by their students as a cool person, students formulate perceptions about their teacher's use of technology. In general, coolness is a positive evaluation attributed to either a person, a thing (e.g., product or technology), or a brand that deviates from the norm and in doing so provides a unique or hip socially desirable contribution to the social environment (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Sundar et al., 2014). Specifically, the focus of coolness in this research is centered on a thing (i.e., a social media platform) rather than on a person (i.e., the professor). Student perceptions of a teacher's technology use, which are referred to in this study as perceived technological coolness, result from teachers adopting newer communication technologies (i.e., social media) in their classrooms. Students associate new technologies in the classroom as being attractive, hip, or unique. For example, Sundar and colleagues (2014) found users considered communication technology devices cool if they were "novel, attractive and capable of building a subculture around it" (p. 179). In other words, technological coolness is not a popularity contest, nor is it about liking the technology or its degree of usefulness (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Sundar et al., 2014).

Student perceptions of classroom technology use can heighten expectations and can lead to negative evaluations, particularly when expectations are not met. Such is the case when cool communication technology devices come on the market and underwhelm consumers by not performing to expectations or meeting expectations (Sundar et al., 2014; Sundar, 2008).

As new technology ages and more teachers adopt it for classroom use, student perceptions of the coolness of the technology evolve (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Sundar et al., 2014). The more widespread a trend, the less autonomous it becomes and the less cool it is perceived (Berger, 2008; Warren & Campbell, 2014; Sundar et al., 2014). Through a series of experiments Warren and Campbell (2014) explored the relationship between autonomy and coolness. In their research, consumers perceived a product design that deviated from the norm as being cooler than a typical product design that reflected the norm. However, deviating too far from the norm did not necessarily influence perceptions positively. Researchers found a curvilinear relationship between the level of autonomy and perceptions of coolness, with those ideas that deviated too far from the norm influencing perceptions negatively (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Essentially, when a trend or technology is widely adopted, it loses its coolness (Berger, 2008; Sundar et al., 2014; Warren & Campbell, 2014).

Anik (2018) suggests one challenge of maintaining the perception of being cool is “keeping up with ever-changing trends and fads while still being perceived as autonomous, authentic and having an attitude” (para. 19). The same could be argued for faculty who aim to engage with students in meaningful ways and strive to enhance student learning by using newer social media platforms as pedagogical tools. Much like evaluations of cool technology, student’s perceptions of technological coolness (i.e., perceptions of teachers’ use of communication technology—social media—in the classroom) are likely to evolve, making it difficult for teachers to remain perceptively cool without adopting the latest technology trends within their classrooms (Anik, 2018; Sundar et al., 2014).

Research Questions

Literature reviewed for this study presented opportunities for further research regarding students’ perceptions of teacher credibility, technological coolness, and social media use in communication classrooms. The following research questions are offered:

RQ1. How do students report that teachers use social media platforms for teaching purposes in communication courses?

RQ2: To what extent does teacher use of social media platforms in communication classes affect student perceptions of technological coolness?

RQ3: To what extent does teacher use of social media platforms in communication classes affect student perceptions of teacher credibility?

RQ4: To what extent are student perceptions of technological coolness related to their perceptions of teacher credibility?

Methodology

Participants

Participants were college students (*N*=330) enrolled in communication programs at one of three universities across the United States. Communication students were recruited at universities ranging in size from 10,000 to 35,000 students, with two of the universities enrolling 30,000 to 35,000 students per year. Within the sample, 24% of the participants were male (*n* =78), 62% (*n* = 206) were female, and 14% (*n* = 45) did not self-identify. Students ranged from 19 to 46 years in age (*M*=22.36; *SD* = 3.05). A majority of the students were seniors (47%; *n* = 154) and juniors (33%; *n* = 108). Because students had to be taking classes within their major (i.e., public relations, journalism, advertising, etc.), students were more likely to be upperclassmen opposed to freshmen (0.3%; *n* =1) and sophomores (7%; *n* = 22).

As shown in Table 1, data collected from students in this study are reflective of national social media platform trends. Students primarily use Facebook (94%), Instagram (91%), YouTube (89%), and Snapchat (72%) at least one or more days per week. Students also reported their teachers are using Facebook (49%) and YouTube (19%) more than any other platform in their classes. A national study conducted by the Pew Research Center (Perrin & Anderson, 2019) revealed people 18-24 years old use YouTube (90%), Facebook (76%), Instagram (75%), and Snapchat (73%) the most, with U.S. adults using YouTube (73%) and Facebook (69%) more than any other platform.

Table 1

Use of Social Media Platforms Identified in this Study and from a National Study

	U.S. Adult Use		Study's Sample	
	U.S. Adults	18-24-year-olds	Teacher Use	Student Use
Social Media Platform	%	%	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Facebook	69%	76%	163 (49.4%)	269 (94.4%)
YouTube	73%	90%	64 (19.4%)	254 (89.1%)
Twitter	22%	44%	44 (13.3%)	186 (65.3%)
Instagram	37%	75%	23 (7%)	260 (91.2%)
LinkedIn	27%	17%	19 (5.8%)	200 (70.2%)
Other	N/A	N/A	9 (2.7%)	N/A
Snapchat	24%	73%	6 (1.8%)	204 (71.6%)
Pinterest	28%	38%	2 (0.6%)	174 (70.2%)

Note. Data from U.S. adults reflects those people who said they have ever used the social media platform. This national survey data was collected by Pew Research Center from Jan. 8 to Feb. 7, 2019 (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Data from the study's sample reflects students' typical use of these platforms at least one or more days per week as well as the social media platforms students reported their communication's professor used most recently for teaching one of their classes. Other social media platforms reflect student reports of faculty use of Vimeo, Blogger, and Slack.

Procedures

Data for this study was collected from college students enrolled in communications programs at three universities in the western, eastern, and southeastern part of the United States. Students minoring in communications and pre-majors were not included in the study. The online survey was sent to a purposive sample of students majoring in communications at each of the respective universities. The survey was distributed to students after Institutional Review Board approval. As an incentive, participants were entered into a drawing for one of four $25 Amazon gift cards.

Measures

Only students who indicated they had a communications professor who used social media for teaching purposes were allowed to participate in the study. Before completing the survey, students were told to "think about the communications professor who most recently used social media for teaching one of your classes" and then indicate which platform their professor used the most: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Afterwards, students described how the social media platform was used in class. As part of the qualitative analysis of the open-ended question, common topics and ideas were identified when they were repeated throughout student comments. The topics and ideas were grouped into themes and then reported by social media platform.

Teacher Credibility. To measure student evaluations of teacher credibility, this study adopted McCroskey and Teven's (1999) 18-item teacher credibility scale. This scale consists of three subscales that measure the three dimensions of teacher credibility: competence, trustworthiness (McCroskey & Young, 1981) and goodwill (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Each subscale consists of six indicators that use seven-point semantic differential response scales. For example, indicators of trustworthiness are: (1) honest/dishonest, (2) untrustworthy/trustworthy, (3) honorable/dishonorable, (4) moral/immoral, (5) unethical/ethical, and (6) phony/genuine. The competence indicators are: (1) intelligent/unintelligent, (2) untrained/trained, (3) inexpert/expert, (4) informed/uninformed, (5) incompetent/competent, and (6) bright/stupid. The goodwill indicators are: (1) cares about me/doesn't care about me, (2) has my interests at heart/doesn't have my interests at heart, (3) self-centered/not self-centered, (4) concerned with me/unconcerned with me, (5) insensitive/sensitive, and (6) not understanding/understanding. The teacher credibility scale has been found to be valid and reliable (e.g., Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998) and has been used to evaluate teacher credibility in a variety of teaching contexts (e.g., DeGroot et al., 2015; Johnson, 2011; Schrodt & Turman, 2005). All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Cronbach's alpha for each factor was satisfactory: competence (α = 0.91; *M* = 6.22, *SD* = 1.02), trustworthiness (α = 0.86; *M* = 6.40, *SD* = 0.90), and goodwill (α = 0.91; *M* = 5.99, *SD* = 1.15).

Technological Coolness. To gauge the impact of teachers' social media use in the classroom on student's perceptions, this study adapted the three-factor coolness measures (originality, attractiveness and subculture) from Sundar et al. (2014). These measures were originally developed for assessing perceptions of technology products. However, they are useful for gauging student perceptions of teachers' pedagogical use of social media as they have the potential to reveal the impact of adopting different forms of communication technology on individuals, or what is referred to in this study as technological coolness. Specifically, researchers adapted the five-item originality scale to measure college student perceptions about whether or not they felt their professor who used social media in the classroom was original, unique, out of the ordinary, stood apart from other communication professors, and was novel.

To gauge whether or not students perceived teachers who employed social media within the classroom as being up-to-date and leveraging modern communication technologies, researchers employed two attractiveness measures identified by Sundar et al. (2014). After participants were prompted to think about the communications professor who most recently used social media in the classroom, students assessed whether they considered that professor's use of social media to be hip or cutting edge. The other three attractiveness measures used by Sundar and colleagues (2014) were not employed as they were more likely to produce evaluations of the teacher's personal appearance (e.g., this instructor is stylish, sexy, and hot) rather than the teacher's technology use (i.e. social media).

Assessments of the subculture surrounding classroom social media use was assessed using five items. Specifically, students were asked if instructors who use social media for teaching purposes are *different* from instructors who do not use it for teaching purposes. Students also indicated if instructors who use social media for teaching stand apart from other communication instructors as well as whether or not these instructors stand out from other instructors outside communications. The last two questions assessed whether or not instructors who use social media for teaching are unique and if students consider them to be better instructors than those who do not use social media for teaching purposes. All items were measured on five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Cronbach's alpha for each factor was satisfactory: originality ($\alpha = 0.90$; $M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.15$), attractiveness ($\alpha = 0.87$; $M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.51$), and subculture ($\alpha = 0.88$; $M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.18$).

Findings

RQ1. Student Reports of Social Media Platform Use

Table 2 outlines the various ways students explained how teachers incorporated social media into their communication classes. These themes emerged from the analysis of qualitative data.

Facebook. Half of the respondents said their instructors asked them to use Facebook to submit assignments. Additionally, students said their professors used Facebook for discussion prompts, receiving feedback, gathering assignments, and providing examples of concepts that were taught in class. Most students said they "loved" this, but a couple noted that it was just one more place to check notifications. One student said, “I hated it because along with all the million other things I had to keep tabs on, I then had to keep tabs on Facebook, too. Which I honestly don’t have time nor care to do.” Eight percent of respondents also said their professors used Facebook as a teaching aid to help students understand its features, such as Facebook ads, algorithms, insights and analytics, and live streaming.

Twitter. More than half of the time (54%) students reported professors were leveraging Twitter for individual or in-class assignments. In addition, when used as a teaching aid, students praised the use of this interactive platform and liked it when professors used Twitter for illustrating concepts. One student shared, “We were assigned to tweet at a company to see how fast they responded! An experiment that taught us the power of social media…Making time for it showed that this professor was actually experienced in the field and prioritized an effective application activity like this over book work.”

Twenty one percent of students who identified their professor used Twitter mentioned their professor used the platform to provide some kind of “how-to” lesson. These lessons included best practices for writing tweets, conducting research, and using analytics. For example, in one class, students had to write weekly tweets. Each week the student with the best tweet would win a prize. Some students said their professors use Twitter as a form of communication with them and one respondent said their professor took attendance via Twitter by using a specific hashtag.

Snapchat. Students who responded to the survey did not provide much input about their professors’ use of Snapchat, but when they did provide more details, students indicated professors use the platform as a means of faculty-student communication. For example, one student said their professor held “Snapchat office hours” where the professor was available to provide students with out-of-class help while traveling for work.

Instagram. Thirty-six percent of respondents noted Instagram as being used as part of bigger assignments, such as campaign analytics or research projects. Students said their professors also used Instagram to show them how to create a personal branding page and how to do an Instagram story. One student shared, “I’ve had an art professor who has used Instagram to portray an artist’s layout and I’ve had professors use it to teach us about personal brands and your online image as well.”

Pinterest. Little information was provided by students about their professors’ use of Pinterest; it was only mentioned briefly as being used to show students the basics on the nature of the platform.

LinkedIn. Respondents (67%) said their professors used LinkedIn primarily to teach students about career development, job hunting, and networking. Students said their professors required them to create profiles and upload portfolios of their work. The respondents also said their professors taught them how to properly communicate with others on LinkedIn. Students found this helpful and worth their time. One respondent said, “I had not been familiar with the social media outlet before, and it turned out to be extremely helpful for networking.”

YouTube. Students overwhelmingly (77%) said their professors used YouTube as a teaching aid to show examples of concepts being taught. For example, respondents indicated they watched videos to see good and bad examples of advertisements, public relations, and visual concepts related to what they were discussing. Additionally, a few respondents said their professors had them upload video projects to YouTube, and then, the students would watch these video assignments in class and discuss.

Other. Students mentioned three additional digital platforms used by their professors: Slack, blog platforms, and Vimeo. Slack was used to communicate with students and upload assignments, in particular writing assignments. The blog platform was used to have students submit

Table 2

Student Explanations of How Teachers Use Social Media in Communication Classes

	Social Media Platform						
	Facebook	Twitter	Snapchat	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	YouTube
Reason for Using Platform	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Assignment submission / Replacement for class management system	138 (50%)	28 (54%)	0 (0%)	9 (36%)	0 (0%)	4 (22%)	10 (14%)
How-to use it/Best practices	12 (4%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	5 (7%)
For faculty-student communication	22 (8%)	3 (6%)	4 (100%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Networking/Career development/Personal branding	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	12 (67%)	0 (0%)
Out of class teaching aid	19 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)
Teaching aid to show examples /In-class interactive/workshop type activity	23 (8%)	11 (21%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	56 (77%)
Class discussion	32 (12%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)
For student-to-student communication (e. g. asking each other questions, giving each other feedback)	16 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

As part of a larger assignment (e.g. analytics for a campaign, research for a client)	7 (3%)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)	9 (36%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Weekly live stream discussion/Q&As	5 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Attendance	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total *N* per Column	277	52	4	25	1	18	73

Note. Students were asked, "Which social media platform did your communication's professor use the most for your class?" This was followed up with a question about "How did he/she use the social media platform for your class?" Percentages in each column represent the frequency of students' mentions of how their professors used each social media platform. The number of responses vary depending upon how many people responded and also because some people gave multiple examples of how the social media platform was used.

writing assignments. Similar to YouTube, Vimeo was used to upload video assignments and watch examples in class. Half of respondents who mentioned these platforms noted assignment submission as a reason for using it.

RQ2. Student Perceptions of Technological Coolness

One-way ANCOVAs were run to determine whether students' perceptions of technological coolness differed based upon the type of social media platform teachers used in the classroom whilst controlling for perceived credibility. Perceived credibility was used as a covariate because research suggests (DeGroot et al., 2015) credibility influences student perceptions of teachers, which for purposes of this study is perceptions of technological coolness. The data revealed significant correlations between the three dimensions of coolness and credibility (see RQ4, Table 3). In order to run credibility as a covariate, credibility was reduced to a single dimension ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 0.91$).

For the independent variable, social media platforms were divided into two groups. Researchers based these groups on the social media platforms students reported teachers using more and less frequently in the classroom. These groups were created because research suggests perceptions of coolness among technology devices are often diminished as technology adoption becomes more mainstream and widely adopted in society (Warren & Campbell, 2014). It was anticipated the same would be true for perceptions of teachers who use more mainstream social media channels. Therefore, social media that students perceived to be used more frequently in their communication classes were thereby considered mainstream.

Mainstream platforms were then compared with those platforms students reported teachers using less frequently. The mainstream social media platforms students reported teachers using more frequently than any other included Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The non-mainstream social media platforms teachers used less often in the classroom included Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and few other self-reported channels. Table 1 shows the prevalence of each social media platform students identified communication teachers were using in their classes. The researchers did not report or examine differences among each platform individually as the prevalence of each platform differed so widely. For example, students reported half of the teachers (49.4%) were using Facebook compared to 1.8% who were using Snapchat.

Originality. After adjustment for perceived teacher credibility, there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions of originality among teachers who use different social media platforms, $F(1, 280) = 7.09$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$. The data provided includes the adjusted mean ± standard error. Teachers who used non-mainstream social media

(5.83 ± 0.14), were perceived to be significantly cooler than those who used mainstream social media (5.42 ± 0.06), a mean difference of 0.41 (95% CI, 5.29/5.56 to 5.55/6.11), $p < .05$.

Attractiveness. After adjustment for perceived teacher credibility, there was a statistically significant difference in perceived attractiveness among teachers who use mainstream vs. non-mainstream social media platforms, $F(1, 280) = 9.48$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .033$. The data provided includes the adjusted mean ± standard error. Teachers who used non-mainstream social media (5.68 ± 0.19), were perceived to be significantly cooler than those who use mainstream social media (5.05 ± 0.08), a mean difference of 0.63 (95% CI, 4.88/5.31 to 5.21/6.04), $p < .05$.

Subculture. After adjustment for perceived teacher credibility, there was not a statistically significant difference in the cool subculture created by teachers who use mainstream versus non-mainstream platforms, $F(1, 281) = 1.63$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$. The data provided includes the adjusted mean ± standard error. Teachers who used non-mainstream social media (5.42 ± 0.16) were not perceived to be significantly cooler than those who use mainstream social media (5.19 ± 0.07), a mean difference of 0.23 (95% CI, 5.05/5.10 to 5.34/5.74), $p > .05$.

RQ3. Student Perceptions of Teacher Credibility

For each dimension of credibility, a three-way (2 x 2 x 2) ANOVA was run to determine whether or not the type of social media teachers used (mainstream vs. non-mainstream) and the frequency with which students used mainstream (light users vs. heavy users) and non-mainstream (light users vs. heavy users) social media sites, influenced perceptions of teacher credibility. Frequency scores were calculated by adding the number of days a week students reported using each of the mainstream (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) and non-mainstream (Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and LinkedIn) social media sites. Scores were then divided in half, with light users accessing the specified social media sites an average of zero to three days per week and heavy users accessing the sites an average of four to seven days per week.

For goodwill, the omnibus test revealed a statistically significant simple two-way interaction between the type of social media teachers use and students who are heavy/light users of non-mainstream social media platforms, $F(1, 278) = 5.89$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .021$, but not for mainstream social media platforms, $F(1, 279) = .67$, $p > .05$. The main effects as well as the other two-way and three-way interactions were not significant. One potential reason for the lack of significance among the additional interactions might be due to the fact that the sample did not include students who were both light users of mainstream social media and heavy users of non-mainstream social media sites.

For trustworthiness, data showed a statistically significant simple two-way interaction between the type of social media teachers use and students who are heavy/light users of non-mainstream social media platforms, $F(1, 279) = 5.41$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .019$, but not for mainstream social media platforms, $F(1, 279) = 1.41$, $p > .05$. The main effects as well as the other two-way and three-way interactions were not significant.

For competence the omnibus test did not reveal any significant main effects or interactions.

Goodwill. To further investigate the significant one-way interaction for goodwill (teacher use of mainstream/non-mainstream social media and student use of non-mainstream social media platforms), a two-way ANOVA was run. The data revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 280) = 5.63$, $p < .05$. Students who are light users of non-mainstream social media platforms consider teachers who use mainstream platforms to have more goodwill ($M = 6.13$, $SE = 0.10$) than students who use these platforms more often ($M = 5.75$, $SE = 0.12$). The opposite was true for teachers who use non-mainstream social media platforms. Teachers were perceived to have more goodwill by students who use non-mainstream social media platforms more frequently (*M* = 6.45, *SE* = 0.26) opposed to students who did not use these platforms very much (*M* = 5.95, *SE* = 0.22).

Trust. A similar two-way ANOVA was used to further investigate the significant one-way interaction for trust (teacher use of mainstream/ non-mainstream social media and student use of non-mainstream social media platforms). The data revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 281) = 3.99$, $p < .05$. Students who are light users of non-mainstream social media platforms consider teachers who use mainstream platforms to be more trustworthy (*M* = 6.49, *SE* = 0.08) than those students who use non-mainstream platforms more often (*M* = 6.29, *SE* = 0.09). The opposite was true for teachers who use non-mainstream social media platforms. These teachers were perceived as more trustworthy by students who frequently use non-mainstream social media platforms (*M* = 6.61, *SE* = 0.21) opposed to those who do not use these platforms very much (*M* = 6.21, *SE* = 0.17).

RQ4. Perceptions of Technological Coolness and Teacher Credibility

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between technological coolness and teacher credibility. The data revealed a positive and relatively strong/moderate

Table 3

Relationship between Teacher Credibility and Technological Coolness

	Coolness: Originality	Coolness: Attractiveness	Coolness: Subculture
Credibility	r (*N*)	r (*N*)	r (*N*)
Competence	.526** (*284*)	.568** (*284*)	.338** (*285*)
Goodwill	.460** (*284*)	.427** (*284*)	.321** (*285*)
Trust	.414**(*285*)	.366** (*285*)	.299** (*286*)

***p<0.01 (2-tailed)*

relationship between each dimension of credibility (competence, goodwill, and trust) and technological coolness (originality, attractiveness, and subculture). Table 3 shows the variables with the strongest relationships as being competence and attractiveness (r =.568) and competence and originality (r =.526).

Discussion

This study examined student perceptions of social media use in the classroom and technological coolness and their effect on teacher credibility. While some teachers may struggle with the topic of coolness as it relates to the classroom, it should be remembered that technological coolness is a measure of student perceptions of social media technology that has been adopted for classroom use. As seen in Table l, more than three-fourths of all teachers adopted one of the current mainstream social media platforms in their classrooms: Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Facebook was the teacher's preferred social media platform as half of the students reported teachers using it within the classroom.

Collectively, YouTube or Twitter were adopted by a third of the teachers. Primarily, they used YouTube to show curriculum-related videos in class and Twitter for one-off, in-class assignments. However, less than a fourth of teachers adopted one of the current non-mainstream platforms, even though these platforms were used by nearly two-thirds of the student sample. Of the few teachers who did adopt newer platforms, students reported these teachers were using Instagram as part of larger social media research projects, LinkedIn for career development, Snapchat for teacher-student communication, and Pinterest to teach students how to use the platform. Students also reported a small minority of professors using Slack, blog platforms, and Vimeo.

These findings reveal a disconnect between the social media platforms students report teachers using and the social media platforms students use most often. For example, Twitter ranked third on the list of platforms used most often by teachers, but it was last on the list of platforms used by students. Moreover, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Pinterest were platforms that students reported teachers using the least, but students' use of these platforms was high in comparison. Instagram in particular ranked second on the list of platforms used by students. Additionally, comparison of the student social media usage data in this study with the recent Pew data (Perrin & Anderson, 2019) show that a greater percentage of communication students use almost all of the social media platforms (except Snapchat) more frequently than the general population of U.S. adults and their 18-24 year-old cohort (see Table 1).

Study findings also demonstrate that teacher use of social media in the classroom has a positive effect on student perceptions of teacher credibility and technological coolness. When teachers adopted social media platforms that were not widely used in the classroom by other professors (i.e., Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest, etc.), the perceived technological coolness of the instructor increased. This finding is not surprising considering when a trend or technology is widely adopted it loses its coolness (Warren & Campbell, 2014).

Leveraging social media platforms that are not widely adopted helped communication professors' classroom experiences stand apart from the classroom experiences of other communication professors. This occurred because the social media technologies that are not widely used were perceived as being more original, unique and novel and they were seen as considerably more hip and cutting edge (i.e., attractive). But, using different types of social media, whether or not they are widely adopted by other teachers is not necessarily going to create a unique subculture in the classroom. That is, students did not think the experiences with technology in communications classrooms assessed in this sample were different or unique from the classroom technology experiences of those who teach other subjects inside or outside communications. To create a subculture, teachers have to do something that is totally different and outside student's expectations within the classroom. Even adopting newer social media channels doesn't help professors create a classroom experience with technology that stands apart because these channels are the same options that everyone has (Sundar et al., 2014).

While practitioners and educators agree that "staying up-to-date on technology is the single most important credential public relations educators can focus on" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018, p. 108), deviating from the norm or expected social media platforms most other teachers are using can result in positive perceptions of technological coolness. Like other socially constructed concepts, perceptions of technological coolness evolve and change (Sundar et al., 2014). Therefore, teachers should continually work to stay current on social media and find innovative ways for incorporating newer platforms into the curriculum. Much like brands and products that appropriately diverge from the norm in an effort to be cool (Warren & Campbell, 2014), this study shows teachers who deviate from the norm or expected social media platforms within the classroom can positively influence perceptions of technological coolness.

When examining the impact of social media use on teacher credibility, the findings confirm and expand research by McArthur and Bostedo-Conway (2012) who found perceptions of teacher credibility were related to the instructor's Twitter use. This study found that students who frequently use newer social media platforms evaluate teachers who use these same platforms as being more trustworthy and as having more goodwill than teachers who do not use these platforms in their classes. If professors do not use these newer platforms, then they run the risk of losing an opportunity to increase trust and goodwill among students who use these newer platforms. But, there is really no loss (or gain) of credibility for using social media that has become more ubiquitous.

Finally, this study revealed that there is a significant, positive correlation between teacher credibility and technological coolness, as it relates to instructor use of social media in the classroom. As this finding highlights, these two student perceptions do not exist in isolation, but they vary together. While the data do not support a cause-effect relationship, they do provide evidence that, no matter what teachers may think about students' perceptions of technological coolness, perceptions of faculty member credibility seem to be intertwined with perceptions of technological coolness.

Pedagogical Implications. Examinations of teacher social media platform use in the classroom provide opportunities for all teachers to: 1) see what other professors are using to engage and communicate with students, 2) learn new, best practices, and 3) experiment with social media platforms that students taking communication courses are currently using. Given this study's findings, professors shouldn't be afraid to experiment with platforms that are not mainstream among the general population but are widely adopted by students. Professors who were evaluated by students in this study are considered highly credible. By experimenting with different social media platforms, professors will not lose credibility; but by strategically choosing platforms that students frequently use, they can gain credibility in the classroom. Also, understanding what social media platforms students are using can help illuminate the dichotomy between teacher social media use and student use. Potential social media platforms for professors to consider including in pedagogical practices can be found in Table 1. The study's qualitative data also provides insight into how professors can use these social media platforms (see Table 2).

Limitations. While this study provides a thorough statistical analysis of the data, more data from professors who use non-mainstream social media platforms would allow for broader statistical analyses and comparisons. Additionally, students were asked to respond about only one platform that one of their communication professors used, which limits data analysis regarding professors who used more than one social media platform in the classroom. Furthermore, students may not have understood the distinction between digital media and social media as they offered Blogger and Slack as other social media platforms in the open-ended question of the survey instrument.

Future Research. Future research should examine when and how professors ought to adopt novel social media platforms as teaching tools, given that professors must make a significant investment of time and effort to learn how to incorporate these platforms into their classrooms to improve students' perceptions of their credibility and technological coolness. In addition, while this study found evidence of a significant relationship between perceptions of teacher credibility and technological coolness, more research is needed to understand this correlation and the potential extraneous variables that could be contributing to the relationship. Also, future research should further examine the relevance of technological coolness by determining if it has an impact on learning outcomes, professor likability (e.g., official or informal student evaluations), course enrollment, and classroom engagement. Moreover, future research should explore whether technological coolness and credibility have implications for the professor's perceived authenticity. Finally, future research should examine how social media use in the classroom affects perceptions of teacher autonomy and privacy.

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Student Perceptions of Guest Speakers in Strategic Communication Courses

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ABSTRACT

Using linkage beliefs theory, focus group and survey methods, we conducted a systematic investigation to understand students' perceptions of having guest speakers in strategic communication courses. Our findings suggest that students prefer relatable speakers from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and alumni and recent graduates are two of the most preferred types of guest speakers. Students prefer to hear about networking tips, career advice and speaker's professional background and journeys. Course-tied topics are less preferable than career-related topics. Visual aids are preferred in guest presentations. Career-related benefits are perceived to have more value than academic and classroom learning benefits. The preferred number of guest speakers in a semester is three.

KEYWORDS: Public relations, advertising, strategic communication, guest speakers

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In many college classrooms, across many disciplines, guest speakers have become a familiar figure and teaching tool. Past research shows that if utilized correctly, they can be a valuable educational asset, particularly in disciplines that emphasize practical experience and hands-on skills. But that outcome is by no means guaranteed, depending upon the quality of guest talks.

The idea that such speakers are a welcome addition to a class is well documented. Students view speakers as someone who can teach them more about "real life" experience in the field of their choice and serve as a potentially valuable professional connection who can help them succeed in that field (Byrd et al., 1989; Kamoun & Selim, 2007; Merle & Craig, 2017; Metrejean et al., 2002; Wortman, 1992; Zou et al., 2019). A recent review of 18 studies across 13 disciplines suggests that having guest speakers enhances pedagogy by improving teaching outcomes and leads to a mutually beneficial relationship for the students, professors, and speakers (Zou et al., 2019). In some cases, the speakers themselves may view their appearance in the classroom as a potentially valuable recruiting trip to scout for young talent who could be an asset to their firms. Instructors see the speakers as bringing perspectives and knowledge to the subject that the instructor may not have, and perhaps on a less lofty note, as a way to fill valuable class time and provide a needed break (McCleary & Weaver, 2008). However, the mere presence of such a speaker in the class does not guarantee a successful or valuable educational experience, particularly if there has not been adequate communication between the instructor and speaker, sufficient integration of the speaker's appearance into the course curriculum, or a clear assessment of student needs and interests, including the desired topics and preferred formats (Kamoun & Selim, 2007; Laist, 2015; Lang, 2008; Metrejean et al., 2002).

Previous studies suggest that a good guest speaker is knowledgeable, dedicated, and credible (Eveleth & Baker-Eveleth, 2009;

Farruggio, 2011). Also, a good guest speaker is an excellent communicator who understands students' needs, prepares well, and knows how to engage and motivate students in the classroom (Lee & Joung, 2017).

There are only a few empirical studies that focus on the use of guest speakers in communication and journalism courses, in addition to some anecdotal essays that offer tips on having guest speakers in the classroom. Given the potential value of the classroom speaker to the learning experience, we believe it is important to supplement anecdotal evidence with new empirical data on how to ensure a positive experience. Using focus group interview and survey approaches, this study examines what makes a successful guest talk in strategic communication courses and how students perceive guest speakers. This research takes an important step in that direction by learning and conveying what students want, expect, and respond to when a guest speaker enters their classroom.

Literature Review

In this conceptualization, we relate linkage beliefs theory to guest speakers and review literature regarding guest speakers.

Linkage Beliefs Theory

Based on associationist theory with a presumption that attitude is derived from linked beliefs, Culbertson and his colleagues proposed the linkage beliefs theory and further developed and tested the theory by conducting a series of studies (Culbertson, 1992; Culbertson et al., 1993; Culbertson & Stempel, 1985; Denbow & Culbertson, 1985). The theory proposes that a person's attitude is connected to the linkage between the attitude object and a person's beliefs and goals. In their survey study of patient perceptions of the image of a medical center, Denbow and Culbertson (1985) found that salient positive beliefs, including the patient's feeling that "physicians care about their patients," "up-to-date care is associated with teaching function," and "people who answer the phone at the center are usually informed and helpful," positively affect the patients' perceptions of the center's image.

In addition to applying the linkage beliefs theory to the patient relations from the attitude impact perspective, Culbertson (1992) tested the theory in alumni relations but from the behavioral impact perspective. He found that the similarity-based linkage, ego-involvement linkage, and instrumental linkage contributed to the intent to join an alumni chapter.

These studies developed and tested the linkage beliefs theory in public relations settings. The linkage beliefs theory connects the audience and public relations practitioners and is useful in audience segmentation. The practical value of the linkage beliefs theory is that it can help a practitioner identify salient linkages, strengthen existing positive linkages, build new useful linkages, and strategically link the target audience's goals, needs, and values to the organization's goals via persuasive messages. As such, the public relations strategies and tactics, such as creating clear, creative, and appealing message content and selecting appropriate communication channels, mirror the efforts for effective linkage (Culbertson, 1992; Denbow & Culbertson, 1985).

In a pedagogical setting with strategic communication elements, the linkage beliefs theory connects the target audience (i.e., students) and instructors. In the case of a guest speaker event, the theory guides an instructor to identify the salient positive links between the student beliefs/needs and teaching-learning goals, and further devise strategies of planning an effective guest talk, such as the choice of a guest speaker and the topic and format for the guest talk.

Guest Speaker Studies

Previous studies have discussed various aspects of the use of guest speakers, specifically planning details, types of guest speakers, topics of guest talks, formats for guest talks, guest talk tests and assignments, benefits for guest speakers, and guest talks in an online setting. This research is reviewed below.

Planning and Implementing a Guest Speaker Event in Classes

Designing and implementing a guest speaker event requires the instructor's efforts before, during, and after the event. Before the event, the instructor should set appropriate expectations for the guest talk that tie to the course objectives, share the necessary course materials with the speaker, ask for the guest speaker's biographical information, and communicate with the speaker about the logistic issues and do's and don'ts in the classroom as needed (Cloud & Sweeney, 1988; Henderson & Streed, 2013; McClearly & Weaver, 2008; Metrejean et al, 2002; Payne et al., 2003). Also, the instructor should prepare students for the guest talk by informing them of the guest speaker's visit, providing the speaker's information, and asking students to prepare questions (Cloud & Sweeney, 1988; McClearly & Weaver, 2008; Metrejean et al, 2002; Payne et al., 2003). During the event, the instructor should make sure the guest speaker talks about their professional background and includes a Q&A session (McClearly & Weaver, 2008; Metrejean et al., 2002; Payne et al., 2003). After the event, the instructor sends the speaker a thank you letter and obtains feedback from both the speaker and students to help improve the future guest speaker events (McClearly & Weaver, 2008; Metrejean et al., 2002; Payne et al., 2003).

While the importance of guest speakers has been well documented in various disciplines (e.g., Zou et al., 2019), the studies on the use of guest speakers in communication and journalism courses are rare, other than some anecdotal essays. Envisioning the guest speaker as a supplement to the instructor, Roush (2013) suggested best practices in terms of using guest speakers in mass communication and journalism courses, such as "Don't overuse guest speakers" and "find guest speakers who have personalities" (p. 15). In a PRSA article, Henderson and Streed (2013) offered guidelines for a successful guest speaker event in a public relations course. They emphasized guest speakers should respect students and professors, and "collaboration between the professor and the guest speaker, mutual preparation and clear expectations are essential to a successful classroom experience for everyone" (para. 22).

Only one empirical study was found that assessed students' perceptions of guest speakers in communication courses. Merle and Craig (2017) surveyed journalism and mass communication students from a variety of communication classes at two institutions on their perception of guest speakers, including preferred topics, types of speakers and presentation formats, and perceived effectiveness and benefits. Their study analyzed student perceptions of guest speakers in mass communication and journalism curriculum overall as opposed to any specific sub-field, such as public relations and advertising, which was encouraged by the authors as a topic for future research and is one of the factors driving the present study.

We started by asking the first question about students' experiences with guest speakers in strategic communication courses (RQ1), which was a topic largely missing from the literature.

> RQ1: What experiences did students have with guest speakers in strategic communication courses?

Types of Guest Speakers

A variety of guest speakers can be invited to the classroom. Past studies in other disciplines offered some guidance, including inviting a mix of professionals, faculty members, and even graduate students (Lang, 2008; McClearly & Weaver, 2008; Metrejean et al., 2002; Payne et al., 2003; Soiferman, 2019). In mass communication courses, Cloud and Sweeney (1987) suggested using recent graduates and avoiding people who are out of the loop. Instead of aiming for recent graduates, Roush (2013) suggested professors "shoot for the moon with guest speakers" (p. 15) by inviting high-profile professionals to journalism and mass communication courses. In their survey of journalism and mass communication students' perception of guest speakers, Merle and Craig (2017) found that students like guest speakers from the industry better than professors.

The diverse and even seemingly contradictory advice that emerges from the literature makes an opportunity to further examine students' preferred types of guest speakers, particularly in strategic communication courses. Thus, the following two research questions are presented:

RQ2: What types of guest speakers do students prefer in strategic communication courses?

RQ3: What types of organizations that guest speakers are associated with do students prefer in strategic communication courses?

Topics of Guest Talks

Previous studies indicated that students like to hear about the guest speaker's personal experiences and professional journey (McCleary & Weaver, 2008; Soiferman, 2019), particularly "when a guest speaker can use industry experiences to illustrate how to apply (or not to apply) a theory, concept, or idea that incorporates the learning objectives of the course" (McCleary & Weaver, 2008, p. 406). Career-oriented advice is also a popular topic of guest talks (Kamoun & Selim, 2007; Metrejean et al., 2002).

In journalism and mass communication courses, Merle and Craig (2017) found that students prefer to have a guest lecture that is professionally oriented. Course-related guest talks seem not to be as preferable as career-related topics. They found that less than 16% of participants like the topics of theoretical frameworks or methodological issues in guest talks. With a focus on guest talks in strategic communication courses, this study proposes the following research question:

RQ4: What topics do students want guest speakers to cover in strategic communication courses?

Format for Guest Talks

Previous research suggested that guest talks should have visual aids (Payne et. al, 2003), but reading from notes should be avoided (Metrejean et al, 2002). In journalism and mass communication courses, students tend to prefer an active presentation style from guest speakers that includes components such as providing examples and an interactive Q&A section (Merle & Craig, 2017). With a focus on guest talks in strategic communication courses, this study proposes the following research question:

RQ5: What format for the guest talk in strategic communication courses do students prefer?

Being Tested and Having an Assignment Based on Guest Talks

Should students be tested and have an assignment based on guest talks? Very few empirical studies have addressed this topic. In their experimental study on the role of test-expectancy on student learning and evaluations of guest speakers, Hite et al. (1985) found students in marketing courses do not want to be tested over guest talk content, but they also found if students know they are going to be tested, a more positive learning experience occurs. The scarcity of research prompts the research question below:

RQ6: How do students perceive being tested and having an assignment based on guest speaker content in strategic communication courses?

Benefits of Guest Speakers

Guest speakers enrich students' learning experiences by helping them gain first-hand knowledge from practitioners, as well as networking opportunities (Byrd et al., 1989; Wortman, 1992). Metrejean et al. (2002) found that accounting students consider guest talks helpful in "alleviating students' fears about career choices," offering "encouragement," giving "some insight that will expand on what they are studying or give them information they would not get directly from the course material" (p. 360), helping "to focus more on the future" and providing "insights into what employers want in an accountant" (p. 357).

Merle and Craig (2017) found that journalism and mass communication students tended to believe guest talks can enhance their learning experience, are effective in the classroom, and add overall value to the class content. To explore student perceptions of the guest speaker benefits in strategic communication, a sub-field of mass communication, a research question is posited:

RQ7: What benefits of guest speakers do students perceive in strategic communication courses?

Guest Talks in an Online Setting

With the increasing use of online teaching, the use of guest speakers in an online setting can be both beneficial and challenging. Using an example in an online social work course, Sage (2013) asserted that technical assistance will be needed for guest speakers, and that students should be encouraged not to post distracting notes during the session. Privacy and copyright issues need to be taken into consideration as well.

The effectiveness of using virtual guest speakers is mixed. Henderson et al. (2018) found that MBA students evaluated using a guest speaker in a face-to-face setting as a more effective teaching method than the online setting. L. Hemphill and H. Hemphill (2007) found that guest speakers can be used "sparingly in online discussions while still maintaining the quality of the online discussion and frequent, meaningful interactions among students" (p. 287).

In a 2012 PRSA article, some public relations professors emphasized the importance of having guest speakers face the challenges of teaching millennials public relations in the fast-changing technology environment. The tactics they shared included inviting guest speakers to speak in both classes and PRSSA clubs, and inviting them to speak in person or via video conferencing (Jacques, 2012). Thus, the last research question explores online guests:

RQ8: How do students perceive having guest speakers in online strategic communication courses?

Methods and Results

This study had two phases. In Phase 1, we conducted two focus groups to explore student perceptions of guest speakers in strategic communication courses. In Phase 2, we further examined the research questions via a survey to confirm and add to the findings from a larger sample.

Phase 1: Focus Groups

A qualitative focus group approach was employed in this study, and the method details and findings are reported as follows.

Focus Group Interview Methods

Considering the scarcity of empirical studies on how students perceive guest speakers in strategic communication courses, initial focus groups were an appropriate research method to explore insights from students and to provide a foundation for a follow-up survey.

Two focus groups were conducted in September 2017. The target participants were students who enrolled in strategic communication courses in fall 2017 in a journalism school at a public Midwestern university that offers strategic communication courses, including introductory, writing, creative concepts, research, and capstone topics.

After the research protocol was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board, the recruitment process started. A recruitment flier was posted on the Blackboard sites of three strategic communication classes. These were undergraduate courses with a few seats available for graduate students. The study was also announced in classes. Each participant received one percentage point of extra credit in exchange of their time/effort. Pizza was provided during each focus group session.

Seven students participated in the focus group on Sept. 25, 2017.

The participants included one male student and six female students; the breakdown in educational level was one master's student and six undergraduate students. Eight students participated in the focus group on Sept. 27, 2017. The participants included one male student and seven female students. All participants were undergraduate students.

Each session lasted about 45 minutes. Both sessions were audio recorded and took place in a conference room. In both sessions, one of the authors who was not the instructor of the participants served as a moderator. A research assistant served as a note taker. Letters were assigned to participants in place of their names for the sake of their privacy. The focus group discussions started after participants signed the consent form.

The focus group discussions were semi-structured, including the topics of students' preferences of the types of guest speakers, preferences of the content and format for the guest talk, and benefits of having guest speakers.

The recordings of the two focus groups were transcribed after the focus group sessions were completed. The research proposal, transcripts, field notes, and the three authors' reflections were used to analyze the data. Each of the three authors independently read these study-related documents carefully, and identified the emergent themes, points with supporting evidence, and quotes. Then the three authors met and discussed their findings and came to a consensus.

Focus Group Results

All the participants in both focus groups reported they have had experience with guest speakers in their various courses. The first research question explored their experiences with guest speakers.

Likes and Dislikes. Most participants stated that relevance and fit were particularly important to them. If the guest speaker did not fit in with their interests or the overall theme of the course, they did not seem to care much about them. Furthermore, students felt a need to have their voice heard by having some agency in choosing guest speakers by participating in a poll early in the semester.

Students also acknowledged having a variety of speakers was informative and eye opening and at times, resulted in a change in career paths. For example, one participant stated: “I had a speaker come in my freshman year in my first semester. I came in as a strat. comm. major… she completely…changed everything that I wanna do, and she’s been an inspiration to me since.”

The participants did not like speakers who put an excessive focus on themselves, did not leave ample time for questions and answers, did not have aesthetically pleasing visual aids, had too much material on visual aids, read off the PowerPoint slides, or reiterated course material. For example, one participant complained of a speaker who “kind of talked at us, not with us.” Another participant criticized a guest speaker who “talked a little bit too much about herself.” One student lamented a speaker who “followed her PowerPoint [too much], I don’t know, she…read directly from her PowerPoint…that’s almost insulting, I could read it just as well as you could.”

Participants also seemed to suggest that smaller classes are more conducive to having guest speakers than larger class sizes as the former provide an environment that fosters connections by engaging in a more intimate interaction with the guest speakers. In smaller classes, students preferred spending more time and engaging with guest speakers; in larger classes, students seem to emphasize a more general introductory approach and some way to network with the speakers.

The majority of the participants stated that the opportunity to network was one of the primary advantages of having guest speakers in class. Furthermore, participants liked when the instructor or the guest speaker themselves provided the students an opportunity to connect with them either through social platforms such as LinkedIn or via email.

Participants stated they did not particularly like it if they were expected to know the content from the guest speaker's presentation for an exam, but also said it was a good motivator to attend the presentation. One student stated that she did not have guest speakers in the online class she took and really missed that aspect of class.

Types of Guest Speakers. In terms of the types of guest speakers, most participants preferred to have working professionals (compared to academics), alumni, and a mix of early career and senior-level executives. For example, one participant stated:

> I think both [recent graduates and senior-level professionals] are very, very, very valuable 'cause the recent grads are the ones that [we] can most connect with, and they have been in your shoes most recently. But the higher-level-up professionals may be the ones that get you your internship or your job. So again, from a networking standpoint, they are both important.

Due to the global nature of the field of strategic communication, most participants expressed a desire to have more international guest speakers in their classes. The following quote from a participant illustrates this sentiment clearly: "I think [they] give you a whole new perspective, especially [in] our field . . . it's a global field now. So it's important to have that."

There were no differences expressed in preference based on gender. In both focus groups, none of the participants cared if a guest speaker was a male or a female.

Types of Organizations. In the same vein, none of the participants were particularly concerned about the organizations that guest speakers were associated with. The participants did not care if the guest speakers worked in government, for-profit, or not-for-profit organizations. However, participants did appreciate hearing the differences between agency work and working with a particular organization and suggestions about how they themselves might apply the knowledge once they start working.

Topic Preference. None of the participants suggested a desire to have guest speakers cover course content. Overwhelmingly, the participants were interested in hearing about each guest speaker's journey. All the participants echoed a desire to learn about the speakers' personal narratives, their experiences, day-to-day working conditions, and the challenges that they faced and how they solved them. In addition, most participants liked to hear about things that would advance their career, including job hunting and personal growth tips. The following quote further illustrates this point:

> I think novelty is very important. When people . . . give their backstory . . . I think that's super important. Just kind of understand and kind of humanize them a little bit, makes you more comfortable with listening to them. So it is not just some adult talking at you.

Format Preference. Both groups suggested that guest speakers should adopt a conversational tone, should be interactive, engaging, interested in answering students' questions, and show warmth and respect for students. Some students mentioned that having an activity such as discussing a case study that emulates real-world problems could also be an interesting way to engage students. As mentioned previously, students preferred a visual aid, and they did not like speakers reading off the slides.

In sum, our focus group interview findings suggest that students prefer speakers from a variety of backgrounds and experiences with whom they could relate and prefer to hear about tips related to networking, job search, and career advancement. The focus groups served as a precursor or pilot for a larger follow-up survey, to answer further research questions.

Phase 2: Survey

A quantitative survey approach was employed, and the method details and survey results are reported below.

Survey Methods

Procedure. The target survey participants were students enrolled in strategic communication courses in spring 2018 in the same journalism school where the focus group sample was formed. While we only recruited 15 focus group participants from three strategic communication courses to help explore students' perceptions of guest speakers as a foundation for the follow-up survey, we tried to recruit survey participants more broadly from all strategic communication courses offered in that semester in order to further examine student perceptions of guest speakers with a larger sample size. The strategic communication courses offered during that semester were taught by eight instructors, including two of the authors. The researchers reached out to the six other instructors, asking them to help distribute the survey to their students. All instructors agreed and helped.

After the survey protocol was approved by IRB, the survey instrument was developed for online delivery and data gathering via Qualtrics. On April 2, 2018, an invitation letter including a survey link was sent via email to those instructors who agreed to help. The students were asked to answer the questions about their perceptions of guest speakers in strategic communication courses.

On April 10, a reminder was sent to participating instructors except for one author, who sent this reminder email, asking the participating instructors to encourage their students to take the survey as soon as possible. The survey was closed at 1:40 p.m. EST on April 24, 2018. One hundred and seven students completed the survey. Unfortunately, it was not possible to calculate the response rate because one student may take several strategic communication courses.

Some participating instructors offered one percentage extra course credit in exchange for the students' time/effort, and some did not. The consent form appeared after the survey introduction page. The questionnaire was devised to be completed within 15-30 minutes.

Participants. Of the 107 respondents, 79.4% were female, 15.9% were male, and 4.7% did not provide their gender information; the vast majority were white (80.4%), 5.6% were black, 2.8% had Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin, 2.8% were Asian, and 8.4% had other ethnicity background or did not provide their ethnicity information. Of the 102 students who provided their information on age, year in college, and major, their average age was 20 years old; 32.4% were sophomores, followed by 28.4% juniors, 25.5% freshmen, 12.7% seniors, and 1.0% graduate students; 53.9% were majoring in journalism (n = 55), among which 72.7% were in the strategic communication track (n = 40); 23.5% were non-journalism communication majors (n = 24), such as communication studies and commercial photography; and 22.5% were in other majors, including marketing, and retail merchandising and fashion product development (n = 23).

In all, 93.5% of the 107 respondents had heard guest speakers in their strategic communication courses before. The students' guest speaker experiences were largely in traditional classrooms. Only three students said they had guest speakers in their online strategic communication courses.

Measurement. Guided by our focus group findings and related studies, the measurement of key variables was developed and explained as follows.

Experience of Having Guest Speakers. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their guest speaker experiences in strategic communication courses on a 5- point scale ranging from 1 (highly satisfied) to 5 (highly dissatisfied).

Types of Guest Speakers. Eight statements were evaluated by respondents using a 5- point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) to assess the preferred types of guest speakers. These statements included "I would really like to have faculty members as guest speakers in my strategic communication courses." And "faculty members" was replaced by "junior-level professionals," "senior-level professionals," "recent graduates," "alumni," "men," "women" in the other six statements respectively. We also included a statement "I would really like to have international guest speakers in my strategic communication courses." These eight statements had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.82.

Types of Organizations. Four statements were rated by respondents using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) to assess the preference for the guest speaker's organization. One statement was "Guest speakers in strategic communication courses should come from corporations and industry." In the other three statements, "corporations and industry" were replaced by "advertising and PR agencies specially," "nonprofit organizations specially," and "government departments and agencies," respectively (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.85).

Topics of Guest Talks. Participants were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements on hearing the topics of "career advice," "network tips and opportunities," "personal backgrounds, experiences, and back stories of the guest speaker's professional journeys," "industry trends," and "a specific topic tied closely to the course" on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The five statements measuring topic preference had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.90.

Format for Guest Talks. Similarly, participants were asked to indicate their preferences on "a conversational format" and "use visual aids," by using a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Participants were asked to indicate the importance of having a Q&A session in guest talks on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (extremely important) to 5 (not important at all). Also, participants were asked to indicate what percentage of time should be saved for Q&A.

Being Tested and Having an Assignment Based on Guest Talks. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale with the statement that "Students should be tested on guest speaker content," ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). They were also asked to rate the helpfulness of having an assignment based on guest talk content, ranging from 1 (extremely helpful) to 5 (not helpful at all).

Benefits of Guest Speakers. Based on Merle & Craig (2017) and our focus group study, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) with eight statements regarding benefits of having guest speakers, including "giving me an opportunity to network with the guest speaker," "so I can feel more confident in strategic communication career decisions," "so I can be more aware of strategic communication career opportunities," "to help understand the industry at large," "to help enrich the curriculum," "to help improve my attention in class," "to help me take a break from the same instructor," and "to help enhance my learning experience" (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88).

Having Online Guest Speakers. Participants were asked to evaluate the importance of having guest speakers in online strategic communication courses, using a 5-point scale from 1 (extremely important) to 5 (not important at all). They were also asked to rate their level of agreement with two statements: "Guest speakers should be invited to participate in online strategic communication courses," and "Advances in technology (e.g., Skype or FaceTime) can enable guest speakers' participation in online strategic communication courses."

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement "Instructors should have students participate in a survey early in the semester to help choose topics for guest speaker talks" on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Participants were asked how many guest speakers they would like to have in their strategic communication courses in a given semester. Participants were also asked to provide their age, major, year in college, and ethnicity.

Survey Results

The 107 responses received from our survey generated some informative data that allowed us to answer the research questions using descriptive statistics. In tables, certain items have fewer than 107 responses due to missing data.

RQ1: What experiences did students have with guest speakers in strategic communication courses?

Eighty two percent of respondents were highly satisfied or satisfied with their guest speaker experience, and only 5% were dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 0.74$, $n = 100$).

RQ2: What types of guest speakers do students prefer in strategic communication courses?

As Table 1 shows, alumni were the most preferred guest speakers in strategic communication courses ($M = 1.81$), and 82.5% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to have alumni as guest speakers. Recent graduates were perceived as the second most preferred type of guest speakers ($M = 1.83$) with 81.7% of the respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would like to have recent graduates as guest speakers.

Similar to what was found in our focus groups, respondents tended not to care much about the guest speakers' gender. Less than half of the respondents preferred either male (32.7%) or female guest speakers (48.1%). More students preferred senior-level professionals (77.9%) than junior-level professionals (68.9%).

Unlike the focus groups findings, which suggested that students tended to prefer working professionals to academics, the survey data revealed that there were not many differences in preference between senior-level professionals (77.9%), faculty members (68%) and junior-level professionals (68.9%). Focus group data suggested strong support for having international guest speakers. The survey data confirmed the majority of the respondents would like to have international guest speakers (69.2%).

RQ3: What types of organizations that guest speakers are associated with do students prefer in strategic communication courses?

Our focus group data suggested that students were not concerned about the guest speaker's organization, but the survey results tell a different story. Descriptive data in Table 2 indicated 75.7% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that guest speakers should come from advertising and PR agencies specially, and only a little more than half of the respondents (56.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that guest speakers should come from government departments and agencies. About six out of ten of the respondents preferred guest speakers coming from corporations and industry (62.1%) and from nonprofits (66.0%).

RQ4: What topics do students want guest speakers to cover in strategic communication courses?

The survey data were somewhat in line with the focus groups' findings in terms of preferred topics. In focus groups, none of the participants appreciated course content being covered by guest speakers; instead, guest speakers' personal journeys were the overwhelmingly preferred topic. Our survey results (see Table 3) indicated that nearly nine out of ten respondents would like to hear career advice (88.3%), networking tips and opportunities (86.4%), and professional backgrounds, experiences, and backstories of the guest speaker's professional journeys (85.4%). Comparatively, hearing about a specific topic tied closely to the course was lower (72.5%) in preference, though still appreciated by a majority of the students.

RQ5: What format for the guest talk do students prefer in strategic communication courses?

Table 4 shows that the vast majority of the respondents (87.4%) preferred that guest speakers use visual aids (*M* = 1.65). Most respondents (65.0%) preferred that guest speakers employ a conversational format (*M* = 2.24). Our focus group study also suggested that a conversational format and visual aids were the preferred methods of presentation.

When asked about the importance of the Q&A session in a guest talk, 36.9% of the respondents said it is extremely important, and 34% said very important; no respondent said not important at all (*M* = 1.96, *SD* = 0.89, *n* = 103). They were also asked their opinion about what amount of time as a percentage of the presentation should be saved for Q&A in a guest talk. Forty-six point six percent of respondents said 11 to 20% of time should be saved for Q&A, 30.1% of the respondents said 1 to 10%, 13.6% of the respondents said 21 to 30%, and 9.7% of the respondents said more than 30% of time for Q&A.

RQ6: How do students perceive being tested and having an assignment based on guest speaker content in strategic communication courses?

The survey results were in line with the focus groups' findings that students did not like having an exam based on the guest talk, but they can see it as motivation for attending class. In fact, more than half of the participants did not like the idea of being tested on guest speaker content (57.4% disagree or strongly disagree) (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = 0.99, *n* = 101). Also, nearly half of the students who responded considered having an assignment based on guest speaker content to be slightly helpful or not helpful at all (46.6%). Only a handful of the respondents (2.9%, *n* = 3) said having an assignment based on guest speaker content was extremely helpful, and 13.6% of the respondents said very helpful (*M* = 3.52, *SD* =

1.10, *n* = 103).

RQ7: What benefits of guest speakers do students perceive in strategic communication courses?

In focus groups, the majority of the participants stated that networking was the primary advantage of having guest speakers in class. The survey results show richer data on the benefits of guest speakers. Table 5 shows about eight out of ten respondents perceived the benefits of guest speakers to be career-related, including providing an opportunity to network with the guest speaker (87.1%), being more aware of strategic communication career opportunities (84.3%), feeling more confident in strategic communication career decisions (79.4%), and helping to understand the industry at large (78.4%). Although 85.3% of the respondents perceived the benefit of guest speakers as enhancing the learning experience, the pedagogical benefits were not perceived as greater than career-related benefits including helping improve attention in class (53.9%), enriching the curriculum (69%), and helping take a break from the same instructor (72.5%).

RQ8: How do students perceive having guest speakers in online strategic communication courses?

About two thirds (67.6%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that guest speakers should be invited to participate in online strategic communication courses (see Table 6). And overwhelmingly, 91.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that advances in technology (e.g., Skype or FaceTime) can enable guest speakers' participation in online strategic communication courses.

Our study also revealed some interesting findings regarding students' perceptions of their involvement in choosing topics for guest talks. Involvement in choosing a guest speaker and getting their voice heard was one of the "likes" expressed by most of the focus group participants. In the survey, when asked about the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement of "Instructors should have students participate in a survey early in the semester to help choose topics for guest speaker talks," 73.5% of the respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (M = 1.98, SD = 0.88, n = 102).

Also, we found three guest speakers in strategic communication courses in a given semester was the number preferred by the respondents (49%), followed by two guest speakers (18.6%), four guest speakers (16.7%), at least five guest speakers (10.8%), and one guest speaker (2.9%). Only two of the respondents preferred having no guest speakers.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of our study support the linkage beliefs tenets. With mostly satisfactory guest speaker experiences, students' salient beliefs on the benefit of the guest talks and preferences on the types of guest speakers, topics, and formats of the guest talks suggest what the positive links are and what areas instructors can work on to strengthen the connections between students' beliefs and the effective teaching- learning outcome by using guest talks. On the other hand, the breadth of the preferred types of guest speakers and preferred topics of guest talks also suggest the complexity of the links. Our study suggests instructors need to understand the complexity of the links while mapping out the contributing factors to a successful outcome for a guest talk. Our findings are also in line with previous research from Zou et al. (2019) who conducted a review of studies on guest speakers across various disciplines and proposed a "Trilateral Model" delineating benefits of having guest speakers in courses. Our findings have also provided pedagogical implications in using guest speakers in strategic communication courses.

Types of Guest Speakers

It appears students find alumni and recent graduates, two types of most preferred guest speakers, to be a valuable link between their life as a student and their imagined future professional selves, due to the perceptions of similarity (Culbertson, 1992). The finding of recent graduates as preferred guest speakers is in line with Cloud and Sweeney's (1988) suggestion that having recent graduates as guest speakers could be advantageous because students can relate to them and establish a rapport. Instructors can build their own list of potential guest speakers by attending existing alumni events to network with alumni.

It is not surprising that students prefer a good mix of senior-level and junior-level professionals as preferred guest speakers. Obviously, the junior level position would be a starting point for students, but the greater attractiveness of the senior level professionals might be due to their capacity to arrange internships and even job placement. Planning to invite a mix of senior-level and junior-level professionals to serve as guest speakers in a semester would be advisable to benefit students in different ways.

Given the increasing globalization of the strategic communication field, preferring international guest speakers is only natural. For an international public relations course, having an international guest speaker would be ideal. As instructors in the U.S., we are not always mindful of bringing in international speakers. We suggest instructors make contact with their university's international scholar services, which could be a starting point to learn more about international scholars on campus and to identify people who might fit in with their courses. Also, technology could be employed to have guest speakers address the class from remote locations so that the students could hear from a diverse range of speakers.

Guest Talk Topics and Formats

In line with Merle and Craig's (2017) findings, the preferred topics of guest talks were around career advice, networking tips, professional backgrounds, and journeys. Career advice was perceived as the top topic, which suggests students in strategic communication are eager to learn professional advice and practical tips. It is also understandable that the personal journeys of speakers were among the highly preferred topics, as a guest speaker's personal story sharing can enhance students' engagement (Soiferman, 2019).

Should the topic of the guest talk be tied closely to the course? The answer is probably yes. Soiferman (2019) asserted that both declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge are important for students. In practice, guest speakers don't want to stray too far from the course content. The instructor and guest speakers may want to work together to maximize the effectiveness of guest talks by discussing course content before the guest talk.

Our research suggested that ideally, conversational style talks, plus visual aids would be best. Also, it would be wise to present the idea of a Q&A session to guest speakers in advance. These findings are in line with Merle and Craig's (2017) findings. The class dynamics may affect the duration and effectiveness of a Q&A session. An instructor can facilitate the session by asking some general but personal questions such as what you enjoy most about your job and what is the most challenging part of your job.

Survey data also indicated that only about half of the students would like to be tested or have an assignment on guest content, which is somewhat in line with Hite et al.'s (1985) findings that students didn't want to be tested over the guest speaker content. However, as they suggested a more positive learning experience occurred when students are told they would be tested over guest talks, perhaps giving students an assignment or test based on guest content would be a good idea to enhance the learning outcome.

Experience of Having Guest Talks and Benefits of Guest Talks

Our research suggests it would be wise to have guest talks as a teaching tool. It is interesting to see career-related benefits were perceived as higher than academic and particular classroom learning benefits. This may be related to the practical nature of the strategic communication courses. The pedagogical benefits were recognized, although they were not appreciated as much. In order to maximize the benefits of guest speakers, instructors may want to consider the nature of the course and students' year in college and work with the guest speaker to devise the focus of the talk and the timetable. For example, in an upper-level public relations campaign/capstone course, instructors may want to ask the guest speaker to talk about networking tips and opportunities and career advice and leave some time to allow students who are mainly juniors and seniors to network with the guest speaker.

Online Guest Speakers

Although online courses have been implemented in many schools, students' experience with online strategic communication courses is limited, and having guest speakers in online strategic communication courses is rare as well, at least in our sample. Even with such limited experience, students expressed the desire to have guest speakers online. This calls for further empirical studies on the effectiveness of online guest speakers, particularly given the mixed findings on this subject (Henderson et al., 2018; Hemphill & Hemphill, 2007). Instructors could experiment in incorporating guest speakers in an online format with the help of technology, such as incorporating Skype, Google Hangouts, or FaceTime, which can enable participatory behavior in online sections.

Students' Voice and Number of Guest Speakers

Students tended to like playing a role in choosing the topics of guest talks. Previous research suggests when students perceive their voice is being heard and they have agency in their own educational process, that leads to better learning outcomes (Cook-Sather, 2006). Thus, circulating a poll a week or two before the semester starts and inviting students to provide their input on selecting guest speakers based on their interests may help set the right tone for the course and may result in a more enjoyable semester, for both the students and faculty.

Having three guest speakers in a given semester was the most preferred option, which is in line with the tips offered by Roush (2013), who suggested not overusing guest speakers and no more than three or four guest speakers during a class. Indeed, too many guest speakers may affect the course content an instructor may want to cover, and it may also be difficult to manage.

While the students' perceptions of guest speakers will help instructors understand the needs and wants, it is worth noting that that students do not always know what's best for them, and instructors may react to students' perceptions differently according to their knowledge about their students and their experience of hosting guest talks. On the other hand, a successful guest talk cannot be separated from the efforts of a guest speaker. We recommend that guest speakers work closely with the instructors before the talk to learn about the instructor's expectations, understand students' needs, and present the talk in an engaging manner.

Limitations and Future Research

The samples for focus groups and survey research were convenience and purposive in nature. Researchers should be cautious when generalizing the findings of this study to a larger population. Another limitation lies in the sample size. Future research should conduct more focus group discussions to enrich the data. Our survey sample size was also small and limited to one campus. Future research can use large-scale survey research to derive findings based on representative samples that could be generalized to a larger population in various contexts.

Focus group participants were not excluded from the survey, which may affect their survey responses due to their previous exposure to the focus group discussion. Also, a student could take the survey multiple times. Although our data did not suggest that happened, we should have taken a precaution when designing the online survey.

Although the results from our survey research provide useful information, it remains descriptive in nature. Due to the smaller sample size, the present study focuses on the student perception of guest speakers as a group. However, basic statistics show some noticeable and interesting differences in preferences of guest speakers by major, which provides useful information for educators. For example, journalism majors tended to prefer junior-level professionals and senior-level professionals much more than non-journalism majors (see Table 1a) and prefer the industry topics much more than non-journalism majors (see Table 3a). Also, journalism majors tended to prefer the following benefits more than non-journalism majors--opportunity to network with the guest speaker, feeling more confident in strategic communication career decisions, being more aware of strategic communication career opportunities, helping understand the industry at large, and helping enrich the curriculum (see Table 5a). As for the differences in perceptions by year in college, it is worth noting that underclassmen tended to prefer faculty members more than upperclassmen, and prefer recent graduates less than upperclassmen (see Table 1b). Underclassmen tended to prefer the benefits of having an opportunity to network with guest speakers, being aware of strategic communication career opportunities, and taking a break from the same instructor more than upperclassmen (see Table 5b). With a bigger sample size, advanced statistical analysis could be employed to examine statistical difference and generate more information.

Some issues are worth further investigation. For example, students tend to dislike being tested on a guest speaker. What alternative testing tools to examine the guest talk effectiveness exist? Students tended to want to have a say in choosing the topics of guest talks. How should this take place? Collecting more data can offer more robust findings and analyses. In addition, future studies could examine how the type of public relations course might affect student perceptions of guest speakers.

In conclusion, the key things we learned from our research suggest an overwhelming preference for guest speakers from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, who share their personal journey, career advice, and networking tips. This allows students to learn from the guest speakers' personal experiences, so they may apply the knowledge of the speakers' job searching and networking to advance their own careers. Our findings have important practical implications and suggest that diversity and variety of guest speakers and topics create an enriching pedagogical experience. While an instructor plays a key role in planning and facilitating a guest talk, the outcome of a guest talk would also involve the guest speaker's effort and audience's engagement.

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Table 1. Preference of types of Guest Speakers

	M	*SD*	% (agree/ strongly agree)	*N*
Faculty members	2.25	0.87	68.0	103
Junior-level professionals	2.15	0.85	68.9	103
Senior-level professionals	1.9	0.81	77.9	104
Recent graduates	1.83	0.82	81.7	104
Alumni	1.81	0.74	82.5	103
International guest speakers	2.11	0.91	69.2	104
Male guest speakers	2.76	0.84	32.7	104
Female guest speakers	2.29	0.97	48.1	104

***Note**:* 5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree
Cronbach's *Alpha* = 0.82

Table 1a.Preference of Types of Guest Speakers by Major (% of agree/ strongly agree)

	Journalism Major (*n* = 55)	Non-journalism major (*n* = 47)	Total (*N* = 104)
Faculty Members	69.1%	67.3%[a]	68.0%[b]
Junior-level professionals	78.2%	56.5%[a]	68.9%[b]
Senior-level professionals	87.3%	66.0%	77.9%
Recent graduates	89.1%	74.5%	81.7%
Alumni	89.1%	74.5%	82.5%[b]
International guest speakers	78.2%	59.6%	69.2%

Male guest speakers	36.4%	29.8%	32.7%
Female guest speakers	54.5%	42.6%	48.1%

***Note**:* Journalism majos fall under two tracks: news & information track and strategic communication track.

[a] *n* = 46.

[b] *n* = 103.

Table 1b. Preference of Types of Guest Speakers by Year in School (% of agree/strongly agree)

	Underclassmen (*n* = 59)	Upperclassmen (*n* = 42)	Graduate Students (*n* = 1)	Total (*N* = 104)
Faculty Members	72.4%[a]	61.9%	100%	68%[b]
Junior-level professionals	69.0%[a]	69.0%	0	68.9%[b]
Senior-level professionals	78.0%	76.2%	100%	77.9%
Recent graduates	79.7%	88.1%	0	81.7%
Alumni	81.4%	85.7%	0	82.5%[b]
International guest speakers	72.9%	66.7%	0	69.2%
Male guest speakers	32.2%	33.3%	100%	32.7%
Female guest speakers	49.2%	47.6%	100%	48.1%

[a] *n* = 58.

[b] *n* = 103.

Table 2. Preference of Types of Organizations that Guest Speakers are Associated With

	M	*SD*	% (agree/ strongly agree)	*N*
Come from corporations and industry	2.21	0.84	62.1	103
Come from government depts. and agencies	2.4	0.94	56.3	103
Come from advertising and PR agencies	1.93	0.87	75.7	103
Come from nonprofit organizations	2.17	0.82	66.0	103

Note*:* 5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree
Cronbach's *Alpha* = 0.85

Table 3. Preference of Topics of Guest Talks

	M	*SD*	% (agree/ strongly agree)	*N*
Hear career advice	1.59	0.72	88.3	103
Hear networking tips and opportunities	1.57	0.75	86.4	103
Hear about professional background	1.75	0.78	85.4	103
Hear about industry trends	1.85	0.88	75.7	103
Hear about a specific topic tied closely to the course	2.02	0.90	72.5	102

Note*:* 5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree
Cronbach's *Alpha* = 0.90

Table 3a. Preference of Topics of Guest Talks by Major (% of agree/ strongly agree)

	Journalism Major (n = 55)	Non-journalism major (n = 47)	Total (N = 103)
Have career advice	94.5%	80.9%	88.3%
Hear networking tips and opportunities	92.7%	78.7%	86.4%
Hear about professional background	89.1%	80.9%	85.4%
Hear about industry trends	85.5%	63.8%	75.7%
Hear about a specific topic tied closely to the course	74.1%[a]	70.2%	72.5%[b]

[a] n = 54.

[b] n = 102.

Table 4. Preference of Format for Guest Speakers

	M	SD	% (agree/ strongly agree)	N
Prefer a conversational format	2.24	0.91	65.0	103
Prefer guest speakers to use visual aids	1.65	0.72	87.4	103

Note: 5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree

Table 5. Perceptions of Benefits of Guest Speakers

	M	*SD*	% (agree/ strongly agree)	*N*
Giving me an opportunity to network with the guest speaker	1.78	0.73	87.1	101
So I can feel more confident in strategic comm career decisions	1.86	0.87	79.4	102
So I can be more aware of strategic comm. career opportunities	1.75	0.79	84.3	102
Help understand the industry at large	1.86	0.85	78.4	102
Help enrich the curriculum	2.13	0.88	69	100
Help improve my attention in class	2.44	1.02	53.9	102
Help me take a break from the same instructor	2.11	0.88	72.5	102
Help enhance my learning experience	1.81	0.73	85.3	102

Note*:* 5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree
Cronbach's *Alpha* = 0.88

Table 5a. Perceptions of Benefits of Guest Speakers by Major (% of agree/ strongly agree)

	Journalism Major (n = 55)	Non-journalism major (n = 47)	Total (N = 102)
Giving me the opportunity to network with the guest speaker	98.1%[a]	74.5%	87.1%[b]
So I can feel more confident in strategic comm career decisions	89.1%	68.1%	79.4%
So I can be more aware of strategic comm. career opportunities	94.5%	72.3%	84.3%
Help understand the industry at large	89.1%	66.0%	78.4%
Help enrich the curriculum	80%	55.6%[c]	69.0%[d]
Help improve my attention in class	58.2%	48.9%	53.9%
Help me take a break from the same instructor	80.0%	63.8%	72.5%
Help enhance my learning experience	90.9%	78.7%	85.3%

[a] $n = 54$.
[b] $N = 101$.
[c] $n = 45$.
[d] $N = 100$.

Table 5b. Perceptions of Benefits of Guest Speakers by Year in School (% of agree/strongly agree)

	Underclassmen (*n* = 59)	Upperclassmen (*n* = 42)	Graduate Student (*n* = 1)	Total (*N* = 102)
Giving me the opportunity to network with the guest speaker	93.1%[a]	78.6%	100%	87.1%[b]
So I can feel more confident in strategic comm career decisions	79.7%	78.6%	100%	79.4%
So I can be more aware of strategic comm. career opportunities	88.1%	78.6%	100%	84.3%
Help understand the industry at large	81.4%	73.8%	100%	78.4%
Help enrich the curriculum	64.9%[c]	73.8%	100%	69%[d]
Help improve my attention in class	55.9%	50%	100%	53.9%
Help me take a break from the same instructor	78.0%	66.7%	0	72.5%
Help enhance my learning experience	84.7%	85.7%	100%	85.3%

[a] *n* = 58.
[b] *N* = 101.
[c] *n* = 57.
[d] *N* = 100.

Table 6. Perceptions of Guest Speakers In Online Strategic Communication Courses

	M	*SD*	% (agree/ strongly agree)	*N*
Guest speakers should be invited to participate in online strategic communication courses	2.26	0.90	67.6	105
Advances in technology can enable guest speakers' participation in online strategic comm course	1.68	0.66	91.4	105

Note: 5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree

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Taking Experimental Learning to the Next Level with Student-Run Agencies

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of three different experiential learning approaches in public relations education (i.e., a student-run public relations firm approach vs. two variations of the traditional public relations capstone campaigns course) by measuring perceived student learning outcomes. Students participating in the study were enrolled in one of two variations of a traditional public relations capstone campaigns courses or in one student-run public relations firm course at a large southern university. The results suggest that working in a student-run public relations firm promotes students' perceived learning outcomes more effectively than participating in the more traditional capstone experience. Findings also suggest that among the two variations of the traditional capstone courses, the course with a stronger emphasis on direct client contact and engagement was more effective in achieving learning outcomes than was the course with less direct client interaction.

KEYWORDS: Competencies, perceived effectiveness, public relations campaign, public relations capstone, learning outcomes, experiential learning, student-run agency

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There is growing pedagogical debate over what should be taught in public relations courses. One frequently debated topic is how educators might bridge the sizable gap between what professionals' desire from public relations graduates and what new graduates are actually able to do (Commision on Public Relations Education [CPRE], 2018). To address this concern, and to better prepare students for work in the industry, public relations educators have sought to incorporate more active and experiential learning styles into their classrooms (Swanson, 2011; Werder & Strand, 2011). For example, public relations capstone courses often adopt a service-learning approach that allows students to work in teams, conduct research, develop strategic public relations plans, and also create a collection of tactical materials for clients to implement. Public relations educators hope that by integrating experiential learning into their curricula, and in so doing allowing for more realistic hands-on experience, public relations courses can provide students with an opportunity to synthesize and apply the skills amassed and the theories learned during their coursework (Benigni et al., 2004; Bush, 2009; Harrison & Bak, 2017). Several studies support the efficacy of such experiential learning in producing desirable learning outcomes (Reising et al., 2006). However, even public relations capstone courses that adopt a service-learning approach are still limited in providing rich experiential opportunities when it comes to actual implementation of public relations campaigns and their corollary strategies, tactics, and evaluations. In recent years, and for the reasons stipulated above, more than 100 public relations programs have started offering students an educational experience rooted in the public relations agency model (PRSSA, 2019).

Student-run public relations agencies mimic professional public relations agencies "by providing students with a professional environment in which to work on real projects for real clients" (Bush & Miller, 2011, p. 485). This agency model is typically offered as either a replacement for, or supplement to, the traditional public relations capstone course and has shown strong potential in boosting student learning outcomes. Other benefits to students include improved leadership and managerial skills, better client communication skills, increased professional confidence, the learning of central business practices and processes, an increased prominence of the program within the community, as well as stronger and more sophisticated pre-professional preparation (Bush, 2009; Bush & Miller, 2011; Busch & Struthers, 2016; Kim, 2015). Although public relations educators and scholars generally recognize the value of student agencies, relatively little systematic research on perceived student learning outcomes exists when it comes to evaluating whether student-run agencies are effective in achieving common public relations learning objectives and outcomes (Swanson, 2011). To the best of our knowledge, no quantitative study exists that evaluates students' perceived learning outcomes of student agencies as compared to the more traditional capstone experience. If research only examines students who have worked in student-run agencies, thereby omitting the educational experiences of students enrolled in a more traditional capstone course, then there are no grounds for comparison to provide compelling empirical evidence concerning the efficacy of student agencies as a pedagogical model. As Bush and Miller (2011) explain, "[t]he importance of understanding student-run agencies lies in the need to determine if and how communications curricula are falling short of preparing students for the profession and to examine how agencies might fill potential voids" (p. 485).

This study seeks to fill the void in the literature on public relations education by evaluating a student-run public relations firm as an experiential learning model and assessing its effectiveness in producing desired student learning outcomes. In doing so, this study examines the perceived learning outcomes reported by students enrolled in a student-run public relations firm course by comparing them to the perceived learning outcomes reported by students enrolled in two variations of the more traditional public relations capstone course. Given the study's exploratory nature, our aim is not to argue that the below findings about the perceived effectiveness of different experiential learning approaches in public relations education are applicable to all student-run public relations agencies and all capstone courses at every university. Instead, the current study seeks to provide an empirical baseline that will help open up the scholarly discussion about the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches to the culminating experience in public relations education and to further allow for future research to not only test but also build upon the study's central findings.

Literature Review

Public Relations Program Learning Outcomes

According to Turk (2006), a central goal of public relations education is to facilitate and encourage the "linking of public relations education and practice" (p. 5). That is, to train students in ways that enable them to meet, and hopefully surpass, rigorous academic standards while at the same time providing them with the requisite conceptual tools and practical skills necessary to succeed in the public relations industry. After all, the public relations students of today are the public relations professionals of tomorrow. Not only does such a focus help codify the conceptual and practical elements of public relations education and practice, it also helps to prescribe and describe the types of knowledge, values, and skills burgeoning public relations practitioners should ideally adopt, embrace, and proficiently implement. Moreover, Turk's (2006) call for linking education and industry stresses the importance of facilitating productive conversations that span the educational/professional divide, an approach that further allows for industry members to provide feedback concerning graduates' relative preparedness for professional-level public relations work.

The good news is that there is a great deal of overlap between educators' and professionals' beliefs and opinions concerning the types of skills and abilities students are expected to possess following their successful completion of a university-level public relations program. While the list has expanded slightly over the years to include technological and other societal changes affecting the industry, educators and practitioners alike nonetheless agree that students entering the public relations industry should have written and verbal communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving abilities, and planning skills (Auger & Cho, 2018; Brunner et al, 2018; Lane & Johnston, 2017; Larsen & Len-Rios, 2006; Turk, 2006). A recent list with some of the technological and societal changes mentioned above is provided by Manley and Valin (2017) who, following an extensive content analysis of documents representing associations from around the world as well as feedback from association leaders, found that entry-level practitioners should have foundational skills and abilities in writing, oral and visual communication; critical listening, critical thinking and problem-solving skills; global and diversity awareness; technological and visual literacy; strategic planning skills; and flexibility with change.

Additionally, educators and practitioners also agree that public relations programs should include an internship, a practicum, or some other relevant hands-on experience in the field (Todd, 2009). The central goal of such an approach is for students to apply their knowledge and gain valuable experience in a low-stakes environment before they take on more substantial public relations tasks when they enter the profession following graduation. For an increasing number of university public relations programs, this involves providing students with the opportunity to work in student-run public relations agencies that service real clients. A positive side-effect of working with actual clients, as opposed to working through hypothetical scenarios in the classroom, is that students report feeling increasingly confident in their ability to do public relations work (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Haley et al., 2016; Sallot, 1996).

While the goals of both educators and academics align, there is discrepancy, however, between what students are capable of doing and what employers would like for them to be able to do (CPRE, 2018; Neff et al., 1999). That is, “evidence suggests that new graduates do not always meet employer’s [sic] expectations” (Neff et al., 1999, p. 34). Indeed, “while practitioners and educators agree about what entry-level employees should know and do, graduates do not seem to meet these standards regularly” (Neff et al., 1999, p. 35). According to a 2018 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) omnibus survey, practitioners and educators believe that entry-level practitioners lack the skills and abilities required for writing, research and analytics, media relations, ability to communicate, critical thinking, and problem solving that are required in order to succeed in professional settings. This, of course, is by no means a new or novel finding. As Todd (2009) suggests, although educators and practitioners agree that writing competence is a central skill for anyone wishing to make it in the public relations industry, “PR agency professionals reported that entry-level practitioners’ writing skills were ‘bad’ or ‘poor’” (p. 74). More concerning, perhaps, is Todd’s claim that “PRSSA professional advisors are not convinced that faculty are teaching the skills students need in industry” (p. 71). For public relations educators, and for employers looking to hire public relations graduates, these insights certainly are troubling.

In terms of what students need to know and what they should be able to do in order to not only secure but also succeed in entry-level public relations positions, Neff et al. (1999) provided a lengthy albeit useful list of educational outcomes that nicely subsume most of the observations outlined above. Even in light of more recent scholarship, the outcomes they identified have stood the proverbial test of time. For entry-level positions, budding public relations practitioners are expected, in addition to being broadly educated on a variety of topics and having a solid understanding of ethics, current and historical events, as well as social and political issues and controversies, to 1) possess writing skills, 2) display critical thinking and problem-solving skills, 3) have management skills, and 4) show an ability to communicate publicly.

Neff et al. (1999) also detailed four categories of skills that more advanced practitioners should have. In addition to the above, more seasoned or sophisticated public relations practitioners are expected to have 1) solid research skills, 2) display an ability to engage with and handle journalists and media institutions in a professional and competent manner, 3) understand the organizational and the societal role of public relations, and 4) have a solid working knowledge of issues management. Both sets of skills can be improved by combining public relations education with practical application through internships, practicums, student-run agency work, and service-learning initiatives such as the traditional capstone model.

Experiential Learning in Public Relations Education

Experiential learning theory (ELT), which outlines the process by which learning takes place through experience, states that "knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb et al., 2000, p. 41). According to ELT, there is a four-stage learning cycle that includes concrete experience (the learner actively engages in a new experience), reflective observation (the learner reflects back on the experience), abstract conceptualization (reflection creates a new idea or revises an existing abstract one), and active experimentation (the learner tests the new idea by applying it to the world around them, which ultimately leads to a new experience) (Kolb et al., 2000). Concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are the two ways in which a learner can grasp experiences, whereas reflective observation and active experimentation are the two ways in which a learner can transform experiences (Kolb et al., 2000). While the beginning point of the stages is flexible and is typically chosen based on a combination of the learner's preferred learning style and the present situation, the order of the stages is not flexible. Effective learning occurs when the learner cycles through all four phases (Fraustino et al., 2015; Healey & Jenkins, 2000).

One of the reasons this approach is of interest to educators is because it can be applied to a variety of learning environments and contexts. Due to the practical nature of public relations, implementing experiential learning in the classroom is an ideal fit. It helps to break down theoretical concepts and further connect them with practical experiences (Fraustino et al., 2015). According to Toth (1999), a supervised and structured learning environment is important in the public relations capstone course; however, student autonomy and responsibility are essential pieces of experiential learning. Trying to balance these two things can be difficult but implementing a real-world capstone experience and/or leveraging a student-run firm creates an opportunity to do just that.

"While experiential learning is the concept of connecting an experience to learning, it often takes shape in the form of service-learning" (Kim, 2015, p. 58). Service-learning is a specific type of experiential learning that allows students to participate in an organized service activity while simultaneously meeting a community need. Students then reflect back on the service-learning activity in order to connect more with the course content, the overall discipline, and their own personal civic responsibility (Pelco et al., 2014). Service-learning has been advocated by many educators and has shown to have significant positive effects on students' academic learning as well as their personal and social development (Bennett et al., 2003; Pelco et al., 2014; Simons & Cleary, 2006). Service-learning has also been shown to increase understanding and the ability to apply theoretical concepts (Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Researchers looking at service-learning in the public relations classroom have found that it encourages students' ability to think creatively, solve real-world problems, and identify new information needed to reach useful conclusions (Wilson, 2012), as well as boost critical thinking and increase social responsibility (Benigni et al., 2004; Werder & Strand, 2011). Additionally, other service-learning studies have determined that public relations educators should consider it as an option for their classes because it helps students enhance skills that are important for the profession (Bennett et al., 2003; Pelco et al., 2014; Simons & Cleary, 2006). In other words, an experiential learning approach rooted in service-learning is a strong pedagogical tool for use in public relations education (Harrison & Bak, 2017).

While both the traditional campaigns capstone course and the student-run agency model allow for students to move through all four stages in the ELT, we nonetheless propose that there are significant differences in perceived learning outcomes between students who work with clients in a student-run agency setting and students who work with clients in a more traditional capstone course format. To support this argument, we first review the profiles of each pedagogical approach (public relations campaign courses vs. student-run public relations agencies).

Public Relations Campaign Course

The public relations campaigns class is relatively well-established as the capstone experience in many public relations programs. While the course can be implemented in various ways, there are several components that most campaigns courses include (Benigni et al., 2007). Students enrolled in the traditional capstone PR campaigns course often work in teams and are tasked with conducting both secondary and primary research, developing a strategic communication plan, and producing tactical elements. The client may choose to implement the plan once the course reaches its conclusion (Werder & Strand, 2011). Depending on the instructor, multiple groups may compete for the approval of a single client or student groups may work with their own individual clients instead. In the former case, there is no guarantee that any group's work, even if it is of high quality, ends up being chosen by the client. Regardless of the structure of the course, the focus of this traditional capstone course is mostly on providing students with an opportunity to utilize previously learned skills from other courses in the curriculum, including research methods, strategic planning, informative and persuasive writing, ethical decision making, public speaking, and audience segmentation (Worley, 2001). The professor typically takes on the role of facilitator but still reviews key concepts from previous classes and provides periodic deadlines in order to prevent procrastination (Benigni & Cameron, 1999; Benigni et al., 2004; 2007).

This approach to teaching the capstone course has been shown to enhance student learning outcomes, such as increased practical skills, interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, and citizenship (Farmer et al., 2016; Werder & Strand, 2011). However, there are also some noted shortcomings to this pedagogical approach. For example, time constraints do not typically allow for campaign implementation (Benigni et al., 2004). Therefore, although students may interact with a real client to some degree, their communication and involvement with clients is oftentimes limited or sheltered. There is also a lack of accountability because timesheets and payments from clients are not required (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). Additionally, one of the consistently most difficult parts of a PR campaigns course is getting students to understand, develop, and maintain the team-client relationship, partially because the concept of client retention is missing (Benigni et al., 2004; Worley, 2001). Finally, students' willingness to participate plays a large role in the effectiveness of real-world, client-based projects (Fitch, 2011; Harrison & Bak, 2017).

Public Relations Campaign Capstone Course Profile

The public relations capstone course offered at the university where the study was conducted is a three-credit course with an enrollment cap of 33 students per section. Three sections of the capstone were offered during the semester of the study in conjunction with a student-run public relations agency. While all sections of the capstone course had the same learning outcomes and provided students with the opportunity to work with a real client by taking a service-learning approach, professors/instructors nonetheless had freedom to organize the course according to their preferences. For this study, students from three capstone courses taught by two different professors were surveyed, resulting in some important distinctions. We discuss those below.

Public Relations Campaigns Capstone Course - Variation A

At the beginning of the semester, students were assigned to client teams consisting of five to six students. Following their formation, teams were prompted to choose their own clients from a prearranged list. There were several agency team positions – account executive, research director, client relations director/assistant research director, creative director, and programming director/assignment creative director. Students were given the option of selecting their top three team positions and the professor made the final decision. The student groups worked directly with clients and were all required to schedule regular meetings with those clients.
All student groups conducted secondary and primary research and subsequently created a strategic communication plan for their chosen clients. A campaign presentation was made directly to the client during the final week of the semester.

Public Relations Campaigns Capstone Course - Variation B

Similar to Capstone A, students enrolled in Capstone B were assigned to client teams at the beginning of the semester and each student was given the option of indicating their top three agency team positions before the professor assigned the final positions. All student groups conducted secondary and primary research and created a strategic communication plan for their respective clients and presented directly to those clients during the final week of the semester. Unlike Capstone A, student groups were assigned clients rather than choosing them from a list. Additionally, the professor was partially responsible for client interactions and functioned as a go-between, thereby limiting students' ability to directly interact with their clients beyond an initial meeting and the final campaign presentation. However, students were encouraged to check with clients and contact them when needed, while Course A required students to have various client interactions throughout the semester.

Because the level of direct client interaction with students significantly differed in this study, capstone courses were divided into two categories: Capstone A with greater client contact and interaction, and Capstone B with a lesser degree of client contact and interaction. Given that direct client contact can provide an experiential opportunity for students to understand, develop, and maintain the team-client relationship (Benigni et al., 2004; Worley, 2001), it is plausible that students' perceived learning outcomes differ between the two formats.

Student-run PR Agency

Student-run agencies are a newer approach to fulfilling the capstone experience with additional potential benefits to students. While all different and unique in their own ways, student-run agencies nonetheless have several characteristics in common: They operate continuously, are primarily funded through client fees and university funds, have written policy manuals, include a competitive application and selection process, and use a titled structure for the student employees. In student-run agencies, the students are the primary "decision makers" and typically manage the "planning, finances, client negotiation, client complaints, and new client development" (Maben & Whitson, 2013, p.

19). Additionally, it is becoming more common for these student-run agencies to have a dedicated office space. The idea, in short, is for student-run agencies to "mimic professional public relations and advertising agencies by providing students with a professional environment in which to work on real projects for real clients" (Bush & Miller, 2011, p. 485).

This agency model is typically offered as either a replacement for or supplement to the traditional public relations campaigns course and has shown some real promise in boosting student learning outcomes by providing a number of educational benefits (Bush, 2009; Swanson, 2011). Most notable among these benefits, perhaps, is that the learning-by-doing approach gives students an opportunity to actually implement the campaigns they plan—not only does the agency model produce an educational experience that more closely mirrors the professional agency setting that a number of students seek out following graduation, it also produces an experiential depth and richness that the more traditional campaigns course simply is not configured to deliver. Rather than simply pitching a campaign plan that clients may or may not choose to adopt following the conclusion of the capstone course, agency students are tasked with not only researching and formulating campaign plans, they also have to work with clients in real-time as those plans are tweaked, fine-tuned, and implemented. This means that students work closely with clients over time as opposed to simply reaching out during the research phase to ask questions or seek clarification.

The agency model also places an increased focus on client relations and managing client expectations (Benigni et al., 2004; Haygood et al., 2019; Bush et al., 2017; Swanson, 2011). As a result, the agency structure offers a more disciplined business setting and increases team communication skills more than other service-learning courses, including the PR campaigns course. Finally, the benefits of the student-run agency experience also include a rise in professional confidence and readiness (Ranta et al., 2019), the opportunity to learn about leadership and management (Haygood et al., 2019), a chance to practice client relationship maintenance in a low-stakes environment (Bush et al., 2017), and the opportunity to improve administrative skills (Bush, 2009; Kim, 2015; Swanson, 2011). Beyond student learning outcomes, student-run agencies also hold the promise of increasing the prominence and reputation of the academic programs they belong to within their respective communities (Kim, 2015).

However, in spite of the abovementioned benefits, the agency model also presents some unique challenges, including a greater faculty time commitment compared to teaching other courses; struggles with student motivation because other classes can sometimes take precedence; and lack of dedicated space, technology, and money to run the agency (Swanson, 2011). It is difficult to predict student dependability, which can lead to an imbalanced workload among students, with some students doing or taking on more work than others, which is a common issue in other team-based projects and courses as well (Gibson & Rowden, 1994). Client expectations can also be unreasonable as they do not fully understand what outcomes are possible, or even reasonable, and they may also expect students to know more than they do (Bush, 2009; Gruenwald & Shadinger, 2013; Swanson, 2011). Agency students may not find the agency setting effective at improving their soft skills (Swanson, 2019). This means that it may take a considerable amount of time and effort for faculty to manage the agency so that the agency can bring all of the potential educational benefits to life.

Public Relations Agency Profile

The student-run public relations agency course at the university where the study was conducted is elective and is offered as a replacement for or as an addition to the university's public relations capstone campaigns course. While students receive course credit for working at the agency, there is a competitive application process that students must navigate. The study was conducted during the agency's first year and since the agency was still working on getting established, the difference between capstone students and agency students was smaller at that time than what is likely the case today. This particular agency has what Busch and Struthers (2016) consider "high levels of accountability" (p.56), meaning that students meet weekly as a "class" and also work regularly outside of class time with other members of their account teams. Additionally, the agency has a formal title structure, a set of concrete business protocols students are expected to follow and uphold, the ability to charge clients for completed work, and also a dedicated office space for students to work and even meet with clients whenever such meetings are deemed desirable or necessary.

Student employees work directly with clients at every step from beginning to end. Therefore, the format very much mimics the real agency account format, except that there are workshops and active guidance from the faculty adviser throughout the process as plans and deliverables are tweaked, reworked, fine-tuned, and implemented.

All of the agency students in the survey sample described below elected to use the student agency course as a replacement for the traditional public relations capstone campaigns course. Because the university where the study was conducted requires that students complete at least two research methods courses, two public relations writing courses, and a public relations cases/management course before enrolling in the capstone, all students were well-equipped to function as employees even without first completing the traditional capstone course when undergoing training for the agency. The faculty adviser for the student agency also taught the Capstone A variation during the semester that data collection took place.

Perceived Student Learning Outcomes

When focusing on the students' learning perspectives, student agencies can provide significant educational benefits as one of the most active experiential learning models in the public relations academic program. Previous studies on student-run agencies have surveyed agency advisors about agency characteristics (Maben & Whitson, 2013) and interviewed advisors on the pedagogical benefits and risks of student-run agencies (Bush, 2009; Maben & Whitson, 2014). Additionally, there have been several case studies that profile a specific firm and oftentimes provide anecdotal evidence of effectiveness (Gibson & Rowden, 1994; Gruenwald & Shadinger, 2013; Kim, 2015; Swanson, 2011; Ranta et al., 2019), as well as a qualitative study that interviewed current industry professional about the perceived benefits of their student agency experience (Bush et al., 2017).

However, prior to this study, little was known about whether student-run agencies can produce better perceived educational outcomes for students than the traditional public relations campaigns class. While a few of the aforementioned qualitative studies speculate about this topic, a quantitative comparison study that provides a basis for determining its effectiveness based on perceived student learning outcomes does not exist. The current study fills this gap in the literature and also extends previous research by examining how students perceive the pedagogical model of a student-run public relations agency differently from a traditional capstone course as it relates to achieving learning outcomes.

Prior studies have proposed assessing perceived learning outcomes by using both relative and absolute learning assessments (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994). Relative assessments ask a more comparative assessment of learning benefits, compared to other learning opportunities (i.e., they were asked to evaluate whether the course they were in was effective at achieving a list of learning outcomes, relative to other public relations courses). Absolute assessment of learning can be defined as directly assessing whether specific projects or learning opportunities are helpful as a means for achieving desired learning outcomes (i.e., measuring students' developed competency in the course). In addition to adapting the distinctions made by previous studies (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994), this study also attempts to evaluate students' perceived learning outcomes across both relative assessments and absolute assessments. In other words, this study examines the effectiveness of different experiential learning approaches by measuring perceived student learning outcomes.

Students' perception of their development is one of the critical indicators of educational benefits used in prior studies (e.g., Astin et al., 2000; Blomstrom & Tam, 2008; Celio et al., 2011; Farmer et al., 2016; Toncar et al., 2006; Werd er & Strand, 2011; Witmer et al., 2009). Although the specific concept used was slightly different across studies (e.g., students' perceived proficiency, perceived ability, self-awarded strengths and gained confidence, evaluation of acquired strengths, understanding roles, change in perspectives, heightened awareness), the common thread is their use of students' perceived competency to evaluate the benefits of an educational model, such as a service-learning approach. That means, while self-report measures are liable to suffer from conceptual inexactitude, they are nonetheless valuable and have seen extensive use in both psychology and education research. As Howard (1994) explains, "[w]hen employed within a sensible design, self-reports often represent a valuable and valid measurement strategy" (p. 403). Although one might speculate that students are ill-equipped to soberly evaluate their own aptitudes when asked to assess their ability to competently use and apply developing skill sets, there is ample evidence suggesting that self-perceptions of ability are reasonable predictors of actual ability (e.g., Silverthorn, et al., 2005; Van der Beek et al., 2017; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Research also suggests that successful performance of a given task is likely to increase one's self-perception of ability to carry out the same or similar tasks in the future (Schmitt et al., 1986). As such, there is reason to believe that students' self-perceptions of ability are not entirely detached from reality and that their assessments, while nonetheless likely to deviate from actual ability, still serve as a reasonable and valuable measure in its own right.

When discussing self-report measures, we should also be careful not to assume that students are unwitting victims of the Dunning-Kruger effect. That is, that they are incapable of reasonable and rational self-analysis:

> "Developing a self-concept requires the metacognitive ability of evaluating one's performance, which requires the same expertise that is necessary to perform well. The Dunning–Kruger effect thus predicts that low performers are less able to accurately judge their own performance and may overestimate themselves, whereas high performers are better at judging their performance… This view predicts that the relation between achievement and self-concept becomes stronger with increasing ability" (Van der Beek et al., 2017, p. 480-481)

Therefore, to assess the effectiveness of student-run agencies in public relations programs versus public relations capstone courses by measuring perceived student learning outcomes, the following hypotheses were proposed.

H1a-b: Student agency students will report a higher relative assessment of the pedagogical approach compared to students in public relations capstone courses A and B.

H2a-d: Student agency students will perceive the agency as more effective in achieving entry-level competencies than students in public relations capstone course A across the following categories: (a) writing skills, (b) critical thinking/problem-solving skills, (c) management skills, (d) ability to communicate publicly and initiative.

H3a-d: Student agency students will perceive the agency as more effective in achieving entry-level competencies than public relations capstone course B across the following categories: (a) writing skills, (b) critical thinking/problem-solving skills, (c) management skills, (d) ability to communicate publicly and initiative.

H4a-d: Student agency students will perceive the agency as more effective in achieving entry-level competencies than public relations capstone course A across the following categories: (a) research skills, (b) ability to handle the media professionally, (c) knowledge of the role of public relations, (d) knowledge of issue management.

H5a-d: Student agency students will perceive the agency as more effective in achieving entry-level competencies than public relations capstone course B across the following categories: (a) research skills, (b) ability to handle the media professionally, (c) knowledge of the role of public relations, (d) knowledge of issue management.

As discussed earlier, given that direct client contact can provide an experiential opportunity for students to understand, develop, and maintain the team-client relationship (Benigni et al., 2004; Worley, 2001), it is plausible that students' perceived effectiveness differs between the two formats. Therefore, we proposed the following research question below:

RQ: How do students perceive the educational effectiveness of Capstone A versus Capstone B?

Methodology

To examine the proposed hypotheses and research question, this study used an online survey methodology. The participants in this study were recruited from public relations capstone courses as well as a student-run public relations agency course at a large, southern public university.

Sample

All students enrolled in the two capstone course variations and the student public relations agency course were asked to participate in the survey. A total of 100 students participated in the online survey and the response rate was approximately 98%. Out of 100 participants, 17 (17%) were from the student-run PR agency and 83 students (83%) were from three sections of public relations campaign courses. Among the capstone courses a total of 33 (40%) students were enrolled in Capstone A, the course with greater client interaction, and 50 (60%) were enrolled in two sections of Capstone B, the course with less client interaction. 85% of the sampled students (n=85) self-identified as female.

Procedure

Students were invited to take an online survey. After reading an informed consent form, students were then asked to answer a series of questions focusing on relative assessment and absolute assessment across entry- and advanced level competencies.

Survey Instrument

By adapting the categories proposed by Cohen and Kinsey (1994) and Aldoory and Wrigley (1999), the survey items in this study included relative assessment items and absolute assessment items. The absolute items asked students to assess how much they perceived a specific course to be helpful to them in achieving entry- and advanced-level competencies, while the relative assessment items asked how students perceived their learning outcomes in the course compared to other public relations courses.

Relative Assessment. Relative assessment was examined using five items on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree); “the client projects of this class were more useful for placing classroom material in context,” “the client projects of this class were a more effective learning exercise,” “I was more motivated to work on the client project of this class," "the client projects in this class were more helpful in understanding the relationship between the course and the real world," and "learning about public relations took place more in the client projects of this class." The relative assessment items were adapted from prior studies (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994) and the wording was slightly modified to fit the context of the study. For example, instead of asking "relative to other assignments," participants were asked to answer the above items "relative to other public relations courses."

Absolute Assessment. To measure perceived educational benefits of different pedagogical approaches, an instrument was developed by adapting items from prior studies and modified to fit the purpose of the study (CPRE, 2018; Neff et al., 1999; Simons & Cleary, 2006; Turk, 2006; Werder & Strand, 2011). Most notably, the survey instrument was designed to align with the suggestions by the 2018 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) report. Detailed discussion on the public relations program learning outcomes can be found in the earlier section. The absolute assessment items included two categories: entry-level and advanced-level competencies. Entry-level competencies include: 1) writing skills, 2) critical thinking and problem-solving skills, 3) management skills, and 4) an ability to communicate publicly. Advanced level competencies include: 1) research skills, 2) an ability to engage with and handle journalists and media institutions in a professional and competent manner, 3) a knowledge of the organizational and societal role of public relations, and 4) a knowledge of issues management. A more detailed breakdown of the specific measurements included in each category and reliability scores can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement items and reliability scores

Variables	Measures	*M (SD)*	*α*
Relative Assessment: *Relative to other public relations courses*		6.24 (1.04)	.93
	The client projects of this class were more useful for placing classroom material in context.	6.43 (.98)	
	The client projects of this class were more effective learning exercise.	6.42 (1.05)	
	I was more motivated to work on the client project of this class	6.08 (1.21)	
	The client projects of this class were more helpful in understanding relationship between course and real world.	6.20 (1.30)	
	Learning about public relations took place more with the client projects of this class.	6.09 (1.38)	
Entry Level Competency Assessment: *Taking this class, I improved my ability to…*			.87
Writing Skills		5.68 (1.17)	
	Write clear messages targeted toward publics using current technology	6.17 (.93)	
	Produce various types of traditional writing materials, e.g., news release, media pitch, feature stories etc.	5.72 (1.35)	
	Utilize important PR software (e.g., Cision, Meltwater, etc.)	5.24 (1.84)	
	Understand how to pitch to the media	5.40 (1.69)	
	Produce various types of social media posts, e.g., Facebook, Blog, Twitter	5.89 (1.28)	
Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills		6.28 (.86)	.93
	Listen	6.21 (1.06)	
	Take the role of the leader	6.24 (1.07)	
	Thinking logically and analytically	6.32 (.89)	
	Solve frustrating situations	6.31 (.91)	
	Compromise when solution could not be found	6.29 (.89)	
Management Skills		6.15 (1.02)	.92
	Work cooperatively	6.39 (.83)	
	Understand client relations	6.26 (1.13)	
	Develop and maintain healthy relations	6.20 (1.15)	
	Overcome difficult or hostile clients	5.82 (1.47)	

	Manage my own time better	6.07 (1.25)	
Ability to Communicate Publicly and Initiative		6.24 (.94)	.90
	Present ideas to client	6.26 (1.09)	
	Speak in public	6.20 (.92)	
	Create presentational materials	6.27 (1.08)	
Advanced Level Competency Assessment: *Taking this class, I improved my ability to…*			
Research Skills		6.00 (1.22)	.91
	Understand audiences and their role in meaningful communication	6.05 (1.32)	
	Conduct and interpret a quantitative research	5.94 (1.39)	
	Conduct and interpret a qualitative research	5.77 (1.58)	
	Connect the research process to success of campaigns	6.23 (1.21)	
Ability to handle the media professionally		5.58 (1.42)	.93
	Create a media list for clients	5.59 (1.51)	
	Find client stories	5.71 (1.47)	
	Pitch client stories to appropriate media outlets	5.53 (1.62)	
	Interact with media personnel	5.47 (1.63)	
Knowledge of the Role of Public Relations		6.00 (1.24)	.96
	Understand organizational culture of clients	5.94 (1.38)	
	Explain the role of public rleations to a management team of clients	6.08 (1.32)	
	Manage various communication technologies	6.07 (1.22)	
	Manage clients' communication channel strategically	5.91 (1.36)	
Knowledge of issues management		6.10 (1.01)	.91
	Follow current issues related with clients	6.13 (1.08)	
	Recognize opportunities available for clients	6.24 (1.02)	
	Recognize current/potential problems of clients	6.18 (1.07)	
	Recognize potential legal or ethical problems clients may face	5.85 (1.34)	

Results

Relative Assessment

H1 proposed that students' relative assessment of the student-run agency would be higher than the traditional public relations campaign capstone courses. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine whether significant mean differences exist, and the findings suggest statistically significant differences among the three groups (F (1, 99) = 6.86, p < .005, ηp^2 =.12). Students in the student-run agency course reported the highest level of relative assessment (M = 6.95, SD = 0.11), followed by Capstone A with greater client interaction (M=6.33, SD =.75), followed by Capstone B (M=5.94, SD=1.24). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that significant mean differences exist between the student run agency and Capstone B. While student agency students reported higher scores than students in Capstone A, the difference was not statistically significant. Therefore, H1 (a) was not supported, while H1(b) was supported.

Perceived Entry Level Competency

H2a-d and H3a-d propose that students' assessment of the agency course at achieving entry level competency was significantly higher than those of the capstone course A and B courses across four categories; (a) writing skills, (b) critical thinking/problem-solving skills, (c) management skills, and (d) ability to communicate publicly.

Students' assessment of the agency at improving their writing skills was higher than students' assessment of both capstone courses (Agency; M=6.56, SD=.60, Capstone A; M=5.62, SD=.87; Capstone B; M=5.42, SD=1.36). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) =6.76, p <.005, ηp^2 =.12). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence as to the course's effectiveness at improving their writing skills compared to students enrolled in the traditional capstone courses. Therefore, H2a and H3a were supported.

Students' assessment of the agency at improving their critical thinking and problem-solving skills were higher than the two traditional capstone courses (Agency; *M*=6.88, *SD*=.23, Capstone A; *M*=6.3, SD=.58; Capstone B; *M*=5.99, *SD*=1.16). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 6.49, p <.005, ηp^2 =.12). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence regarding the agency course's effectiveness at improving their critical thinking and problem-solving skills compared to Capstone B. Therefore, H3b was supported. Due to the lack of a significant difference between the agency model and Capstone A, H2b was not supported.

Students enrolled in the agency reported greater confidence that the course helped them to have better management skills, compared to the traditional capstone courses (Agency; *M*=6.90, *SD*=.21, Capstone A; *M*=6.36, *SD*=.45; Capstone B; *M*=5.75, *SD*=1.25). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 11.07, p <.001, ηp^2 =.19). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence in the course's effectiveness at improving their management skills compared to the Capstone B course. Therefore, H3c was supported. The mean difference between the agency model and the Capstone A course was not statically significant, and therefore H2c was not supported.

Students enrolled in the agency reported that greater confidence in the course has helped them to improve their public communication ability, compared to the traditional capstone courses (Agency; *M*=6.88, *SD*=.23, Capstone A; *M*=6.30, *SD*=.58; Capstone B; *M*=5.98, *SD*=1.16). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 6.49, p <.005, ηp^2 =.19). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence in the pedagogical approach's effectiveness at improving their public communication abilities compared to the Capstone B course. Therefore, H3d was supported. The mean difference between the agency model and the Capstone A course was not statistically significant, and therefore H2d was not supported (see Figure 1 and Table 2).

Figure 1. Entry Level Competencies

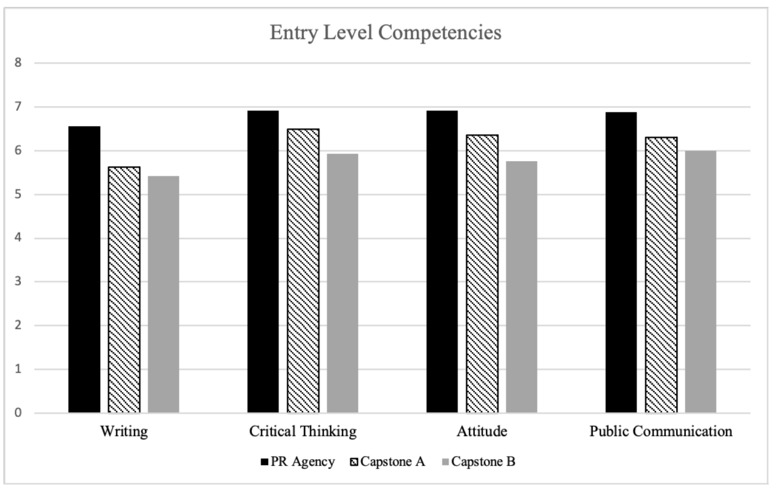

Table 2. Entry Level Competencies

Entry Level Competency	Agency		Capstone A		Capstone B	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Writing	6.56	.60	5.62	.87	5.42	1.36
Critical Thinking	6.91	.20	6.48	.46	5.93	1.02
Management	6.91	.21	6.36	.45	5.75	1.25
Public Communication	6.88	.23	6.30	.58	5.99	1.16

Perceived Advanced Level Competency

H4 and H5 posit that students' perceived effectiveness of a course at achieving advanced competencies would be greater among students enrolled in the student PR agency course compared to those in the traditional capstone courses across four categories: (a) research skills, (b) ability to handle the media professionally, (c) knowledge of the role of public relations, and (d) knowledge of issue management.

Agency students rated their research skills more highly than students of the two traditional capstone courses (Agency: *M*=6.35, *SD*=.94; Capstone A: *M*=6.42, *SD*=.43; Capstone B: *M*=5.60, *SD*=1.51). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 5.93, p <.005, ηp^2 =.11). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence in the agency course's effectiveness at improving their research skills, compared to the Capstone B course. Therefore, H5a was supported. Due to the lack of a significant difference between the agency model versus the Capstone A course, H4a was not supported.

Agency students rated their ability to handle the media professionally significantly higher than students of the two traditional capstone courses (Agency; *M*=6.56, *SD*=.77, Capstone A; *M*=5.34, *SD*=1.19; Capstone B; *M*=5.39, *SD*=1.59). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 5.35, p <.01, ηp^2 =.10). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence in the agency course's effectiveness at improving their media-relations skills compared to the Capstone A and Capstone B courses. Therefore, H4b and H5b were supported.

Agency students rated their understanding of the role of public relations more highly than students of the two traditional capstone courses

(Agency; *M*=6.85, *SD*=.25, Capstone A; *M*=6.14, *SD*=.59; Capstone B; *M*=5.62, *SD*=1.56). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 7.54, p <.005, ηp^2=.14). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence in the agency course's effectiveness at improving their understanding of the role of public relations compared to the Capstone B course. Therefore, H5c was supported while H4c was not.

Agency students rated their understanding of issue management more highly than students of the two traditional capstone courses (Agency; *M*=6.91, *SD*=.18, Capstone A; *M*=6.14, *SD*=.54; Capstone B; *M*=5.8, *SD*=1.23). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test showed that the mean differences were statistically significant (F (2, 99) = 5.35, p <.01, ηp^2 =.10). A Tukey post hoc test suggested that students enrolled in the student agency showed significantly greater confidence in the agency course's effectiveness at improving their issue management skills, compared to the Capstone A and B courses. Therefore, H4d and H5d were supported (see Figure 2 and Table 3).

Figure 2. Advanced Level Competencies

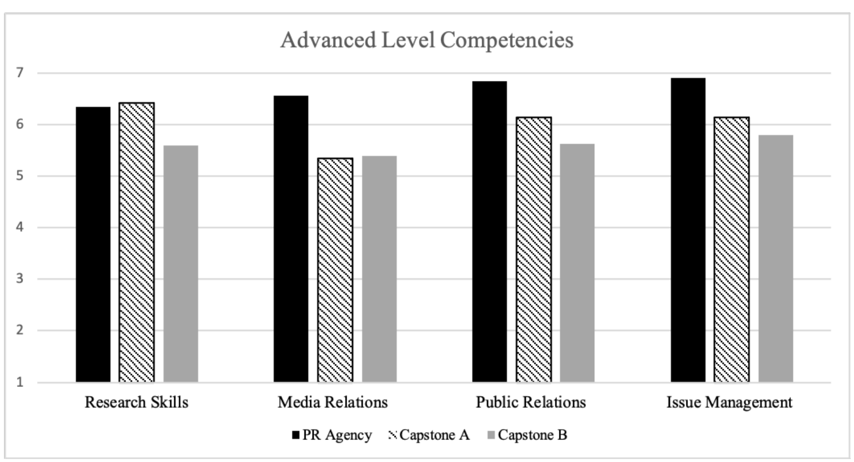

Table 3. Advanced Level Competencies

Advanced Level Competency	Agency		Capstone A		Capstone B	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Research	6.35	.94	6.42	.43	5.60	1.51
Professional Media Relations	6.56	.78	5.34	1.20	5.40	1.59
Public Relations Roles	6.85	.25	6.14	.60	5.62	.156
Issue Management	6.91	.18	6.14	.54	5.80	1.24

Capstone A versus Capstone B

The research question asked whether and how perceived educational benefits differ between capstone courses A and B. Multiple t-tests were conducted to determine the mean differences between the two traditional courses across relative and absolute assessments (i.e., entry level competencies; writing skills, critical thinking/problem-solving skills, management skills and ability to communicate publicly, advanced level competences; research skills, ability to handle the media professionally, knowledge of the role of public relations, and knowledge of issue management). As to relative assessment, students from Capstone A reported higher scores than Capstone B (M=6.33 vs. M=5.94), but the mean difference was not statistically significant. Regarding entry level competency, students' assessment of Capstone A at achieving the entry level competency was significantly higher than Capstone B across two categories: critical thinking/problem-solving skills (M=6.48 vs. 5.92; $t(81)=2.91$, $p < .01$) and management skills (M=6.36 vs. 5.75; $t(81)=2.70$, $p < .01$). As to advanced level competencies, students assessed the capstone A course significantly higher than the capstone B course across two categories – research skills (M=5.62 vs. 5.42; $t(81) = 3.10$, $p < .005$) and understanding public relations roles (M=6.48 vs. 5.92; $t(81)=2.86$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of different experiential learning approaches in public relations courses by measuring perceived student learning outcomes. We surveyed all students enrolled in three public relations campaign capstone courses as well as students enrolled in the student-run public relations agency course at a large southern university over the course of a single semester.

The results show that the public relations agency model was perceived by students as much more effective in achieving learning outcomes relative to other public relations courses. Agency students perceived the pedagogical format as more effective in placing the course materials in context, that the client projects proved to be a more effective learning exercise, that they were more motivated to work on the client projects, that the client projects were more helpful in understanding the relationship between the course and the real world, and that learning about public relations took place more with the client projects in the student-run public relations agency than in the traditional capstone setting. Although students working for the agency reported a greater relative assessment of the pedagogical model, this finding does not necessarily mean that students in the traditional capstone courses felt that their courses were not effective at achieving learning outcomes. The average scores of relative assessments among students in the traditional courses were 6.33 out of 7 (Capstone A), and 5.99 out of 7 (Capstone B). Although students' relative assessment of capstone courses was high, agency students' relative assessment was even higher (6.95 out of 7). That means the agency model, which attempts to provide experiential depth and richness that the more traditional campaign courses cannot, provided students with even greater perceived educational benefits relative to capstone courses, which were already rated high.

When it comes to achieving entry-level competencies, the findings suggested that the student agency showed superior results across all of the tested categories (e.g., writing skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, management skills, and public communication abilities) compared to the public relations campaigns course B. Compared to Capstone A, the agency was perceived as more effective at improving writing skills, but students' perceived competencies in other areas were relatively similar between the agency and the Capstone A course as evidenced by H2's test results. This finding implies that limiting students' direct interactions with their clients, as was the case in Capstone B (the professor was responsible for client interactions and functioned as a go-between), significantly restricts the course's perceived educational effectiveness. While the student agency showed superior results regarding writing skills compared to the Capstone A course, Capstone A students still showed great confidence in the course format when it came to improving their entry-level skill sets across critical thinking and problem-solving skills, management skills, and public communication abilities. This indicates the importance of more direct experiential learning opportunities through client interactions; when the public relations campaign was structured to ensure greater client interaction (i.e., Capstone A) throughout the semester (including client initial interview, consistent communications while completing secondary and primary research, and developing a strategic campaign plan), the capstone course was perceived as much more effective to the point that the course was generally perceived as effective as the public relations agency model at achieving various entry-level skill sets, except for writing skills. At the student agency, students were not only developing a strategic plan for their client but were also implementing proposed communication plans, which required various styles of writing that were tweaked, fine-tuned, and implemented. Actual implementation of communication tactics could have improved the writing skills of agency students more effectively than any traditional capstone courses. This is important in that writing competence is one of the central skills for anyone wishing to make it in the public relations industry.

In evaluating the effectiveness of achieving advanced-level competencies, the differences among the three pedagogical approaches were more apparent. The findings suggest that across numerous areas of advanced competencies, a public relations agency promotes student learning outcomes more effectively than both capstone courses. Agency students reported greater competency across all tested areas compared to the Capstone B course. Specifically, they reported that the agency improved their research skills, media relations skills, advanced knowledge on the role of public relations, and issue management abilities. Compared to the Capstone A course, agency students reported greater competency in media relations and issue management. These results are fairly consistent with previous studies. The agency structure presents a more disciplined business setting and increases team communication skills more than other service-learning courses, including PR campaigns courses. Therefore, agency students got a chance to learn about client relations and managing client expectations, among other things (Benigni et al., 2004; Swanson, 2011). The benefits of the student-run agency experience also included a rise in professional confidence and readiness, the chance to understand leadership and management, practice with client relationship maintenance, and the opportunity to improve administrative skills (Bush, 2009; Bush et al., 2017; Haygood et al., 2019; Kim, 2015; Ranta et al., 2019; Swanson, 2011).

Overall, agency students reported the highest perceived effectiveness and superior development of skill sets across numerous areas, followed by students in the Capstone A course. The Capstone A course, with more emphasis on direct client communication and engagement, was found to be more effective at achieving learning outcomes than Capstone B across critical thinking and problem-solving skills (entry-level), relationship management skills (entry-level), research skills (advanced-level), and knowledge of the role of public relations (advanced-level). The findings demonstrated that actively employing a hands-on experiential and pedagogical approach can be significantly more effective, even within traditional public relations campaign courses.

Implications

Although public relations educators generally support the value of student agencies, little research on perceived student learning outcomes exists – especially on whether student agencies are effective at achieving public relations learning outcomes (Swanson, 2011). There are no quantitative studies that evaluate student learning outcomes of student agencies compared to traditional capstone courses. This study attempted to explore a topic that had not been clearly studied with the intention of providing basic foundational knowledge for future pedagogical studies focusing on student agencies. This study provides useful insights for academics and educators. A student-run agency that adopts an experiential learning approach can be highly effective at achieving learning outcomes where traditional courses may fall short, including the enhancement of writing skills, media relations skills, issue management skills, and more.

According to a 2018 CPRE omnibus survey, practitioners and educators believed that entry-level practitioners lack skills and ability in the areas of research, writing, analytics, media relations, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving, which are required in order to succeed in a professional setting. As the study findings showed, a course with more emphasis on the experiential learning approach can achieve more effective learning outcomes, most notably the student-run agency approach. The findings of this study demonstrated the usefulness of the experiential learning theory (ELT) framework in exploring perceived student learning outcomes of different courses. The process of learning through experience appears to be critical in preparing students for the profession because the knowledge earned from "the combination of grasping and transforming experience" can fill knowledge/skill discrepancies (Kolb et al., 2000, p. 41).

Limitations and Directions for Future Study

Despite the useful insights provided by the study, we acknowledge its limitations. First, this study is exploratory and therefore focuses more on providing useful foundational knowledge for future research to build upon. Because the study was carried out at a single university, future research should expand the population to test the generalizability of the study findings. Also, each school may have different formats for the student agency and public relations campaign course. In other words, with more than 100 public relations programs offering students an educational experience rooted in the public relations agency model and even more offering a public relations campaign course, it is important to note that these experiences are structured differently and we should be careful about making broad generalizations from one exploratory study. Therefore, the current study's findings should be interpreted with caution. In the case of this study, a student-run agency featured the most active experiential learning model followed by Capstone A and Capstone B. The latter course provided a limited form of service-learning in that students worked to meet a real client's public relations needs with very limited direct interaction. Other university courses may have different formats such that the findings here should be adapted with caution.

Second, despite the significant perceived educational benefits of a student-run agency, the format can also propose significant challenges, as discussed earlier (e.g., greater faculty time commitment, lack of dedicated space, technology, and money to run the agency, difficulty in predicting dependability, and unreasonable client expectations). It may take a considerable amount of time and effort for faculty to manage the agency model such that the agency can generate all of the potential educational benefits. Therefore, educators who consider student agencies should look not only at the significant educational benefits but also the realistic challenges it can entail. Future research may also explore the difficulties and needs associated with the experiential learning model rather than just its perceived educational benefits.

Third, the student employees participating in this study went through an application process to be selected to serve as employees, which means that student employees might be high performing students to begin with. Additionally, applying for something is a determined action that also might be associated with high performing students. It is for these reasons that it is important to measure not only absolute learning outcomes but also relative learning outcomes. Future studies may even consider a longitudinal study to more accurately evaluate whether students who worked in a student run public relations agency are better equipped to competently carry out professional public relations tasks than students who enrolled in a traditional capstone course.

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U.S. Students' Perceptions of International Teaching Assistants in the Public Relations Field

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the outcomes of relationships between international teaching assistants and U.S. undergraduate students in the public relations field and whether intercultural communication competence predicts those outcomes. Findings suggest a need for intercultural communication competence in public relations education, not only to achieve better pedagogy but also to better prepare students for public relations practice in an increasingly globalized world.

KEYWORDS: Public relations, education, intercultural communication, diversity and inclusion

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The U.S. has always been an attractive country for international students because U.S. universities provide high quality education and foreign language improvement that cannot be easily found in their home countries (Yildirim, 2012). In addition, U.S. higher education reflects personal and collective freedom for many international students (Strauss, 2017). Therefore, the number of international students in U.S. higher education has continuously increased over the years. There are now approximately 50% more international students at U.S. colleges and universities than there were a decade ago; the number increased 0.05% in 2018/2019 compared to the prior year (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019a). International graduate students often receive different funding opportunities when accepted to U.S. universities. They are either funded through the U.S. government, U.S. private sponsors, international organizations, scholarships from their own respective countries, and often supported through employment with teaching assistantship assignments. One of the primary funding sources for international graduate students in U.S. colleges and universities is teaching/research assistantships, but only 36.4% have an opportunity to benefit from this kind of funding (IIE, 2019b). Those who are recruited as teaching or research assistants have a chance to study closely with faculty members and the students of those universities.

International teaching assistants have positive and negative effects on undergraduate students. They can provide global perspectives to students, contribute to international components of the curriculum, and prepare students for the realities of globalization (Haas, 1996; Peterson et al., 1999; Trice, 2003). Every student learns more when their college experience includes people from different backgrounds, and international students make diversity a meaningful educational asset by bringing different perspectives into the class (Strauss, 2017). In a globalized world, international teaching assistants' presence and their relationships with U.S. students can shape, inform, and correct how they see the world outside of the U.S. (Barker, 2016). Other research, however, suggests that international graduate employees are unable to communicate satisfactorily with undergraduate students (e.g., Alberts, 2008; Clayton, 2000; Borjas, 2000), which may have negative effects on undergraduates' academic performance. Some international teaching assistants may not speak English well enough to have others understand them. Even though their knowledge of the field might be extensive, they may not have the vocabulary to explain issues in depth (Rains, 1983). Today, many universities have created programs to help train international teaching assistants to communicate in English; however, the problem remains (Finder, 2005). Conversely, students may not be willing to adjust to the English language skills of international graduate employees.

Most of the studies about international graduate students focus on their adaptation process to U.S. higher education. Some discuss their social experiences, such as friendship, religious acceptance, and social networks (Moglen, 2017; Nishmin, 2011; Trice, 2004), while others focus on stress and psychological issues (Lee, 2016; Valdez, 1982; Yeh, 1979) and cultural problems (Bresnahan & Chai, 2000; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Yildirim, 2012). Little is known, however, about U.S. students' opinions of international teaching assistants. For instance, Subtirelu (2017) states that some students believe international graduate students are good at communicating one on one; however, their communication ability may not be good when presenting a lecture to the whole class. In addition, international teaching assistants say that using feedback from undergraduate students could be a beginning point for understanding what should be worked on and what should be changed in terms of their teaching adjustment (Bresnahan & Chai, 2000), and their feedback may also contribute to improving relationships between international teaching assistants and undergraduate students. Moreover, although a number of studies focus on international graduate students (e.g., Borjas, 2000; Perruchi & Hu, 1995), none examines the field of public relations directly. To fill this gap, this study uses a survey to analyze the outcomes of relationships between international teaching assistants and U.S. undergraduate students in the public relations field and to determine whether intercultural communication competence predicts those outcomes.

Literature Review

Relationship Management Theory

Ferguson's (1984) conference paper laid the foundations of relationship management theory by emphasizing that public relations should focus on relationships. A number of public relations studies (e.g., Aldoory et al., 2015; Gallicano et al., 2012; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Waymer, 2013) have used this theory to analyze relationships over the years. Relationship management theory changes the focus of public relations from communication to relationships. The value of public relations comes from building relationships between organizations and their publics (Shen, 2017) and communication contributes to the quality of the relationship (Ledingham, 2006). Moreover, "relationship management is an attempt to define the field in terms of what it is" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 56).

In addition, the central constructs of relationships in public relations scholarship have changed through the past several years (Ledingham, 2008). For example, Broom and Dozier (1990) focused on the degree of agreement or accuracy of relationships between organizations and their publics. L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Ehling (1992) suggested trust and reciprocity as attributes of relationships that can be used to measure the quality of organization's relationships with its publics. Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison, and Lesko (1997) identified 17 dimensions from other disciplines, such as interpersonal communication and marketing. Later, these dimensions were reduced to five: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ledingham, 2008). Huang (1997) suggested using four dimensions (control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction), from which Hon and Grunig (1999) developed a scale to measure relationships, which is now commonly accepted (Waters & Bortree, 2012).

Control mutuality is "the degree to which parties agree about which of them should decide relational goals and behavioral routines" (Stafford & Canary, 1991, p. 224). *Trust* means a feeling that parties in the relationship can rely on each other (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). *Commitment* refers to making a decision whether to retain a relationship between parties (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). *Satisfaction* is "the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20).

These four concepts are derived from interpersonal relationship principles (Ledingham, 2006), and research in interpersonal communication and the psychology of interpersonal relationships indicates that these four concepts are good indicators of successful interpersonal relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Therefore, this study uses these four dimensions (control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction) to measure the quality of relationships between international teaching assistants and U.S. undergraduate students.

> RQ1. How do U.S. undergraduate students perceive their relationships with international teaching assistants in terms of relationship outcomes (control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction)?

Moreover, this study also argues that there may be some factors that affect how U.S. undergraduate students perceive their relationship with international teaching assistants in terms of relationship outcomes, such as avoiding ethnocentrism and stereotypes or having personal interaction and intercultural communication competence.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to interpersonal communication between people from different cultures (Gudykunst, 2002). In a globalized world, people of different cultures have increasing communication opportunities using expanding technologies. Speaking a different language, however, is one of the greatest obstacles to communication (Novinger, 2001) because cultural differences are seen as a source of misunderstanding and conflict (Xu, 2013). Educational institutions can play an important role in fostering positive intercultural communication because programs that enable intercultural interactions provide opportunities for intercultural learning and encourage intercultural ties between international and local students (Arasaratnam, 2015).

Some factors may improve intercultural communication between international teaching assistants and U.S. undergraduate students. One is that both sides of the relationship need to be objective with each other, avoiding ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudices (Lei & Schnell, 2012). For instance, if international graduate students are seen as responsible for any language problems, then U.S. students are not being taught to respect diversity and are unprepared for cooperative cross-cultural communication (Subtirelu, 2017). Stereotypes often refer to "uniform antipathy towards a social group" (Cuddy et al., 2009, p. 3). Personal interaction between students from different cultures can help break down the stereotypes that are the obstacles to communication, can improve critical thinking, and allow students to create their own references (Usluata, 1997; as cited in Devran, 2010).

Another factor, high intercultural communication competence, helps students develop cultural empathy, communicate with, and have positive attitudes toward people of other cultures (Arasaratnam, 2006). Intercultural communication competence (ICC) in general terms is defined as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (Lázár et al., 2007, p. 9). A person who has developed ICC can build relationships with people of other cultures (Byram, 1997). Therefore, if undergraduate students have intercultural communication competence, they may be able to establish relational competence with graduate assistants from different cultures.

The Kozai Group developed Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) (2011) to evaluate intercultural effectiveness by focusing on three dimensions that each are comprised of two other dimensions: Continuous learning (self-awareness and exploration), interpersonal engagement (global mindset and relationship interest), and hardiness (positive regard and resilience). Self-awareness refers to being aware of people's values, strengths, weaknesses, interpersonal style, behavioral tendencies, and their effects on other people. *Exploration* refers to being open to understanding other people's ideas, values, norms, situations, behaviors, and new experiences that can make changes in people's thoughts and behaviors. It also measures people's ability to make changes by learning from their mistakes. *Global mindset* is about people's interest in other cultures and people from other cultures. *Relationship interest* measures people's willingness to build and maintain positive relationships with people from different cultures. *Open-mindedness* is related to people's judgments about situations and other people that are new, and measures people's tendency to avoid stereotypes and be open to different behaviors and groups of people. *Emotional resilience* is related to handling emotional experiences and measures people's emotional strength level (IES, 2011, pp. 2-6).

H1: U.S. undergraduate students' degree of self-awareness predicts outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants.

H2: U.S. undergraduate students' degree of exploration predicts outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants.

H3: U.S. undergraduate students' degree of relationship interest predicts outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants.

H4: U.S. undergraduate students' degree of open-mindedness predicts outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants.

H5: U.S. undergraduate students' degree of emotional resilience predicts outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants.

Method

This study used a survey to answer the research question and test the links between U.S. undergraduate students' degree of intercultural communication competence and outcomes of their relationships with international graduate students. A pretest was conducted to test measurement validity and reliability. Following IRB approval, the final questionnaire was created and administered to U.S. undergraduate students.

Participants

Participants were recruited from different universities in the U.S. using nonprobability sampling. The author sent several rounds of the online survey link to the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) to increase the response rate. The author also sent the link to colleagues at various universities, after determining they worked with international teaching assistants in their classes. Using multiple modes of contact helped improve the response in the recruitment phase of the survey (Dillman et al., 2014), but the difficulty in reaching the population required also necessitated the use of a convenience sample and makes determining a response rate not possible in this case. By reaching out through instructors, students enrolled in various sizes of public relations classes, such as introductory, campaigns, and research methods classes, that had international teaching assistants were recruited.

The questionnaire was distributed during class time with the permission of the instructors of those classes. A total of 230 respondents completed the questionnaire. A total of 227 (98.7%) of them studied in public universities, while 3 (1.3%) were enrolled in private universities. A total of 214 (93%) of them call the U.S. home, while the rest were from China, Vietnam, France, Korea, Pakistan, Germany, Italy, and Sri Lanka. Ninety-three (40.4%) of them live in Oregon, 82 (35.7%) in Texas, 32 (13.9%) in California, 6 (2.2%) in Alabama, 5 (2.2%) in Washington state, and 5 (2.2%) in Maryland. There were also 1 to 2 participants each from Oklahoma, Mississippi, New Jersey, Georgia, and Florida. Of the 230 students, 69 (30%) of them had studied abroad, and 196 (85.2%) had traveled abroad. They had different career goals after graduation. Six (2.6%) of them wanted to stay in academia, 107 (46.5%) wanted to work for a public relations agency. Forty-two (18.3%) wanted to work for a global company, while 28 (12.2%) preferred a domestic one. The rest (20.4%) stated that they wanted to work in different areas, such as advertising, politics, business, and finance.

Measurements

The survey first measured U.S. undergraduate students' perceptions of their relationships with international teaching assistants. Following these questions, participants evaluated their feelings when dealing with cross-cultural people and situations, responding to questions that measure their intercultural competence. At the end, demographic questions were asked.

Relationship Perceptions. Following Hon and Grunig's (1999) guidelines to evaluate relationships, this study focuses on relationship perceptions, which implies how one or both parties see the relationship. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure each of the four relationship quality outcomes: control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. *Control mutuality* is related to power (Hon & Grunig, 1999) and in this study, it is conceptualized as the degree of agreement about the power which parties to the relationship have with one another. In this study, *trust* is conceptualized as U.S. students' level of confidence in international teaching assistants (Shen, 2017). *Commitment* measured U.S. students' thoughts about their relationships with international graduate students and whether it is worth spending time and energy to maintain and improve it. This study conceptualized *satisfaction* in terms of students' perceptions and measured students' level of positive feelings toward international graduate students by considering their expectations.

Intercultural Communication Competence. This study used the Kozai Group's Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) (2011), which was developed specifically to evaluate the competencies critical to interacting effectively with people from different cultures. The author used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the degree of self-awareness, exploration, global mindset, relationship interest, open-mindedness, and emotional resilience.

Results

Reliability and Validity of the OPR and ICC measures

To test the item reliability of the OPR and ICC measures, Cronbach's alpha was used. As indicated in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha values for relationship outcomes are .84 for the four items of control mutuality, .88 for the six items of trust, .84 for the five items of satisfaction, and .81 for the four items of commitment. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha values for intercultural communication competences are .70 for the three items of self-awareness, .79 for the three items of exploration, 0.71 for the three items of global mindset, .84 for the three items of relationship interest, .72 for the three items of open-mindedness, and .78 for the three items of emotional resilience. The reliability of the OPR and ICC measures were at or above the acceptable level of .70

(Pallant, 2013), although some of the ICC measures were just above the cut-off.

To test the validity of both measures, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted (see Table 1 and Table 2). For the OPR measures, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value was .94 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value was significant ($p < .05$). For the ICC measures, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value was .84 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value was also significant ($p < .05$). These values were above an acceptable level, which is above .60 (Pallant, 2013). Therefore, the suitability of the data set was confirmed. Factor loadings for each item ranged from .58 to .91. Only one item "in dealing with students like me, international teaching assistants have a tendency to throw their weight around," with .13 factor loading, did not correspond to an acceptable value and was excluded from the data set.

Table 1. OPR Items, Reliability and Factor Loadings

	Item	Mean	Reliability	Factor Loading
Control Mutuality	International teaching assistants really listen to what students like me have to say	3.77		0.81
	International teaching assistants believe the opinions of students like me are legitimate	3.90		0.86
	International teaching assistants and students like me are attentive to what each other has to say	3.77		0.85
	International teaching assistants gives students like me enough say in the decision-making process	3.57	0.84	0.79
Trust	International teaching assistants treat students like me fairly and justly	4.03		0.83
	Whenever international teaching assistants make an important decision, I know they will be concerned about students like me	3.67		0.75
	International teaching assistants can be relied on to keep their promises	3.75		0.86

	I believe that international teaching assistants take the opinions of students like me into account when making decisions	3.79		0.82
	I feel very confident about international teaching assistants' skills	3.71		0.79
	International teaching assistants have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do	4.07	0.88	0.75
Commitment	I feel that international teaching assistants are trying to maintain a commitment to students like me	3.75		0.80
	I feel that international teaching assistants want to maintain relationships with students like me	3.57		0.79
	There is a bond between international teaching assistants and students like me	3.13		0.84
	Compared to other teaching assistants, I value my relationship with international teaching assistants more	2.93	0.81	0.76
Satisfaction	I am happy with international teaching assistants	3.80		0.84
	Both the international teaching assistants and students like me benefit from the relationship	3.42		0.72
	Most students like me are happy in their interactions with international teaching assistants	3.59		0.83
	Generally speaking I am pleased with the relationship international teaching assistants have established with students like me	3.70		0.82
	Most students enjoy dealing with international teaching assistants	3.08	0.84	0.72

Table 2. ICC Items, Reliability and Factor Loadings

	Item	Mean	Reliability	Factor Loading
Self-awareness	I can easily describe my interpersonal style to others	3.84		0.80
	Thinking about my strengths and weaknesses is a good use of my time	3.83		0.78
	Usually I can tell what impact my behavior has on others	3.98	0.70	0.78
Exploration	I treat all situations as an opportunity to learn something	3.86		0.78

	I have developed significant new skills over time	4.28		0.88
	I learn from mistakes	4.20	0.79	0.86
Global Mindset	I routinely read, watch, or listen to international news	3.11		0.81
	My friends would say I know a lot about world geography	2.83		0.80
	Every now and then I seek out information about other countries and cultures	3.75	0.71	0.78
Relationship Interest	I'm interested in meeting people from other cultures	4.35		0.86
	I like to figure out why people do the things they do	4.29		0.86
	Getting to know people teaches you valuable things	4.44	0.84	0.90
Open-mindedness	I can always find something good in any situation	3.73		0.88
	My friends would say I always look on the bright side of things	3.66		0.91
	If I were lost, someone would probably stop and help me	3.65	0.72	0.58
Emotional Resilience	It doesn't take me a long time to get over a particularly stressful experience	3.15		0.84
	I find that little things don't bother me	2.82		0.81
	I'm good at coping with negative emotions	3.25	0.78	0.85

Relationship Perceptions

Results indicate that U.S. undergraduate students generally have good relationships with international teaching assistants. To answer RQ1, which asked how U.S. undergraduate students perceive their relationship with international teaching assistants in terms of relationship outcomes (control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction), each relationship outcome was addressed separately.

Most participants in this study indicated a high level of agreement with the amount of control mutuality that they experience with international teaching assistants. Their level of agreement on the four measures ranges from 53% to 72.2% (Agree and Strongly Agree on a 5-point Likert Scale). The largest agreement measured was for "international teaching assistants believe the opinions of students like me are legitimate" (*M* = 3.9, *SD* = .8480). The other three measures indicated somewhat less agreement about control mutuality: international teaching assistants really listen to them (*M* = 3.8, *SD* = .9066), are attentive to what each other say (*M* = 3.8, *SD* = 8585), and give them enough say in decision-making processes (*M* = 3.6, *SD* = .8969).

Most respondents also indicated a high level of trust in their relationships with international teaching assistants. Their level of agreement on the six measures ranges from 58.7% to 81.3%. The highest measure was obtained for "international teaching assistants treat students like me fairly and justly" (*M* = 4.0, *SD* = .7698), with over 80% agreement. The second highest measure was "international teaching assistants have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do" (*M* = 4.0, *SD* = .8565) with 79.6% agreement. Four other measures ["Whenever international teaching assistants make an important decision, I know they will be concerned about students like me" (*M* = 3.7, *SD* = .8433), "I feel very confident about international teaching assistants' skills" (*M* = 3.7, *SD* = .9745), "International teaching assistants can be relied on to keep their promises" (*M* = 3.8, *SD* = .7731), and "I believe that international teaching assistants take the opinions of students like me into account when making decisions" (*M* = 3.8, *SD* = .8038)] have more than 55% agreement.

Participants indicated a lower level of agreement (18.2% to 64.4%) in terms of the amount of commitment they experience than with the other relationship outcomes. Two measures were below 50% agreement. One, "compared to other teaching assistants, respondents value their relationship with international teaching assistants more" (*M* = 2.9, *SD* =8588), had 18.2% agreement. The other, "there is a bond between international teaching assistants and respondents" (*M* = 3.1, *SD* = 8818), had 30.9% agreement. The greatest level of agreement (64.4%) was recorded for the statement "I feel that international teaching assistants are trying to maintain a commitment to students like me" (*M* = 3.7, *SD* = 8289), followed by "I feel that international teaching assistants are trying to maintain a relationship to students like me" (*M* = 3.6, *SD* = 9444), with 54.8% agreement.

The percentage of agreement (34.9% to 69.2%) with satisfaction measures were lower than the percentage agreement for the control mutuality and trust measures. Similar to commitment, two measures of satisfaction were below 50% agreement: "Most students enjoy dealing with international teaching assistants" (*M* = 3.1, *SD* = 9680), with 34.9% agreement, and "both international teaching assistants and students like me benefit from the relationship" (*M* = 3.4, *SD* = 8765). The highest satisfaction measure was "Most students like me are happy in their interactions with international teaching assistants" (*M* = 3.6, *SD* = 8859). Two of the measures ["Generally speaking I am pleased with the relationship international teaching assistants have established with students like me" (*M* = 3.7, *SD* = 9305), and "I am happy with international teaching assistants" (*M* = 3.8, *SD* = 8736)] recorded more than 60% agreement.

Relationship Perceptions and Intercultural Communication Competence

To test the research hypotheses that assumed a significant relationship between U.S. undergraduate students' degree of intercultural communication competence and outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants, a multiple regression was conducted. Multiple regression helps to identify significant independent variables, and researchers can remove non-significant variables from the analysis (Pallant, 2013). It appears that exploration and relationship interest are statistically significant predictors of control mutuality, as shown in Table 3. The first variable (exploration) made a moderate contribution to the model, with a .18 R^2 value. The second variable (relationship interest) is added for the final model, but this variable made a much smaller contribution. The R^2 increased by only .5. Overall the model accounts for 23% of the variance in control mutuality. These two variables have positive coefficients, which means that more positive exploration and relationship interest increases positive control mutuality. In addition, in the final model, exploration had a higher beta value ($\beta = .42, p < .01$) than did relationship interest ($\beta = .22, p < .01$), which means that exploration had more of an effect than did relationship interest.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting Control Mutuality

	Model 1			Model 2		
Variable	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Exploration	0.42	0.06	0.42*	0.22	0.08	0.22*
Relationship Interest				0.31	0.08	0.31*
R^2		0.18			0.23	
F		49.75*			34.48*	

*$p < .01$.

Table 4 summarizes the regression analysis results for variables predicting trust. Self-awareness, exploration, and relationship interest were statistically significant for predicting trust. As indicated in Table 4, when self-awareness was added to the equation it made a substantial contribution to the overall model fit, with a substantive R^2 value of .21. The second variable (exploration) was added to the model, but this variable made a smaller contribution (R^2 increased by .7). The third variable, relationship interest, was also added to arrive at the final model. This variable also made a much smaller contribution than other variables (R^2 increased by .4). All of the variables have positive coefficients, which means that more positive self-awareness, exploration, and relationship interest increase trust toward international teaching assistants. In the final model, self-awareness shows a more marked effect than the other variables, with the highest beta value ($\beta = .46$, $p < .01$).

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting Trust

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
Variable	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Self-awareness	0.46	0.06	0.46**	0.27	0.07	0.27**	0.18	0.07	0.18*
Exploration				0.32	0.07	0.32**	0.19	0.08	0.28**
Relationship interest							0.28	0.08	0.28**
R^2		0.21			0.28			0.32	
F		61.03**			44.16**			35.42**	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

As shown in Table 5, only exploration was a statistically significant predictor of satisfaction. The other intercultural communication competence dimensions (self-awareness, global mindset, relationship interest, and open-mindedness) were not significant predictors of satisfaction. Exploration made a moderate contribution, with an R^2 value of .17. In addition, exploration has positive coefficients, which means that being more open to understanding other people's ideas, values, norms,

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Satisfaction

	Model 1		
Variable	B	SE B	β
Exploration	0.42	0.06	0.42*
R^2		0.17	
F		47.99*	

*$p < .01$.

situations, and behaviors increases the level of satisfaction in U.S. undergraduate students' relationships with international graduate assistants.

As indicated in Table 6, similar to satisfaction, only exploration was a statistically significant predictor of commitment. Exploration made a moderate contribution to variations in commitment (β = .37), with a R^2 value of .13. It also has positive coefficients, meaning that more positive exploration means more of a feeling of commitment in students' relationships with international graduate assistants.

Table 6. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Commitment

	Model 1		
Variable	B	SE B	β
Exploration	0.37	0.06	0.37*
R^2		0.13	
F		35.79*	

*p < .01.

The models support the hypothesis that U.S. undergraduate students' degree of intercultural communication competence, specifically with regards to exploration, predicts outcomes of their relationships with international graduate teaching assistants. Moreover, the first two models demonstrate that U.S. undergraduate students' willingness to build and maintain positive relationships with people from different cultures are significantly related to their perceived relationships with international graduate teaching assistants, specifically with regards to control mutuality and trust. Also, self-awareness is related to U.S. undergraduate students' confidence in international graduate teaching assistants.

Discussion

Because the number of international students has continuously increased over the years in U.S. higher education, it is important to know U.S. students' perceptions of them. Therefore, this study analyzed the outcomes of relationships between international teaching assistants and U.S. undergraduate students in the public relations field. The quantitative findings suggest that U.S. undergraduate students generally have good relationships with international teaching assistants.

U.S. undergraduate students are happy with the amount of control mutuality in the relationship, which is about the power distribution they experience with international teaching assistants. They do not appear to have issues with international teaching assistants' decisions about relational goals and behavioral routines. They believe that international teaching assistants listen to them, give them enough say in decision-making processes, and believe their opinions to be legitimate, which are significant factors in the teaching and learning process (Blau, 2011). Even though international graduate assistants would appear to be the empowered ones in this relationship, it is interesting that U.S. undergraduate students do not seem to have any issues with this power distribution. International graduate students may be using their power not to have control in their relationships with undergraduate students but to instead give students enough say and listen to their opinions. When students believe that they are taken seriously and treated as important participants in conversations, they feel motivated to participate in their education. If instructors insist on having control in educational relationships, students will not be considered valuable participants (Cook-Sather, 2002). Therefore, it is important to provide students opportunities to utilize their qualities. Because U.S. students believe that international teaching assistants care about them and are happy with the amount of control mutuality, the outcome can affect their learning process positively.

Trust is one of the significant aspects that influences student learning (Kim, 2018) because a student's confidence level in the instructor affects course performance (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Findings indicate that U.S. students have a high level of confidence in international teaching assistants, which can also have positive effects on U.S. students' course performance. They believe that international teaching assistants are fair and just, will do what they say they will, and can do what they say they will. Most students believe that international teaching assistants are trying to maintain commitment and a relationship with them. However, more than half of the participants are neutral about their relationship with international teaching assistants compared to non-international ones. They may have the same feelings about teaching assistants, whether they are international or not. Therefore, future studies should analyze U.S. undergraduate students' perceptions of non-international graduate teaching assistants in order to compare their perceptions with international graduate teaching assistants.

The majority of students are happy with their relationships with international teaching assistants, and they have positive feelings toward international graduate students based on their expectations. Some of them, however, do not enjoy dealing with international teaching assistants. Previous studies (e.g., Clayton, 2000; Borjas, 2000) indicate that U.S. undergraduate students frequently complain about the language proficiency of international teaching assistants. Even though U.S. undergraduate students are generally happy in their relationships with international teaching assistants, it might be better to consider language proficiency as a serious issue, not only for U.S. students but also for international teaching assistants, and expand programs to enhance the ability of international teaching assistants to speak English and teach in U.S. classrooms.

Findings indicate that exploration was a significant predictor of U.S. students' relationships with international teaching assistants. Being open to understanding other people's ideas, values, norms, situations, behaviors, and new experiences plays an important role in the relationships between U.S. students and international teaching assistants. This study also found that relationship interest was a significant predictor of control mutuality and trust. Therefore, if U.S. students are willing to build and maintain positive relationships with international teaching assistants, they are more accepting of the power that international teaching assistants have in this relationship. In addition, they will have confidence in their relationships with international teaching assistants. Another significant predictor of trust was self-awareness, which indicates that being aware of international teaching assistants' values, strengths, weaknesses, interpersonal style, and behavioral tendencies also plays an important role in U.S. undergraduate students' confidence in their relationships with international teaching assistants.

These findings indicate that if U.S. undergraduate students have higher ICC, especially exploration, relationship interest, and self-awareness, they can establish relational competence with graduate students from different cultures, which is significant in the learning process. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Place & Vanc, 2016; Pompper, 2005), this study also emphasizes that it is necessary to increase intercultural competency in public relations education. Because the number of international students has continuously increased in U.S. higher education, their relationships with U.S. undergraduate students play a significant role in their education. Increasing intercultural competency in public relations education may help students to understand other cultures. Moreover, some studies (e.g., McKiernan et al., 2013) indicate that students who have classes related to cultural competence reduce their fear of other cultures, want to learn more about other cultures, and feel that they have become more tolerant to immigrants.

In addition, increasing intercultural competency in public relations education not only helps U.S. students' learning processes during their education but also helps them when they enter the public relations field as public relations practitioners. One of the important duties of today's public relations practitioners is to communicate and manage relationships with diverse and multicultural publics in a globalized world (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009). As the Commission on Public Relations Education report (Turk, 2006) emphasized, "practicing public relations internationally and not just locally has become a requirement, not an option." (p. 42). Some studies suggest, however, that U.S. public relations industry and educational approaches are heavily stressed around the world, yet the U.S. public relations curriculum focuses on ethnocentric values rather than having a global and cultural focus (e.g., Bardhan, 2003; Freitag & Stokes, 2009; Toth & Sison, 2011). Therefore, this study recommends Intercultural Communication as a mandatory class for public relations programs in the U.S., which can include collaborative research with other cultures and institutions; having guest speakers from other cultures; analyzing cultural information through authentic videos; attending cross-cultural activities, such as Chinese New Year, Holi, art festivals, and Obon and Taiko festivals; and analyzing non-US international companies practices instead of U.S. companies practices abroad. Learning more about other cultures can also lead students to learning more about their values and society as well. Besides having classes that focus on intercultural competences, undergraduate programs can offer summer abroad programs or initiatives and support international education experiences, such as international internships, international field research opportunities, and participation in international events in order to enrich students' experiences.

The Commission on Public Relations Education (Turk, 2006) report indicated that knowledge about multicultural and global issues and skills for applying cross-cultural sensitivity should be taught in an undergraduate public relations curriculum, and global concepts must be integrated throughout the curriculum. Therefore, this study suggests that having classes focus on intercultural competence can help students to have this knowledge and skills and prepare them for the public relations industry that addresses issues related to diversity and multiculturalism in today's world.

This study was limited to U.S. undergraduate students in the public relations field. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to other undergraduate students. Scholars may consider applying this study's framework to other fields. In addition, a convenience sample was used, therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. This study also suggests that future studies need to analyze U.S. undergraduate students' perceptions of non-international graduate teaching assistants in order to compare their perceptions with international graduate teaching assistants. In addition, future studies could expand other measures of effective education such as cultural tolerance, other competencies, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and students' satisfaction with learning or understanding. Future research encompassing interviews with U.S. undergraduate students in the public relations field could add depth to these findings by garnering insights into students' lived experiences with international graduate teaching assistants and could analyze the differences in perception of public relations students at different seniority levels. Despite these limitations, there is still much to learn from these results.

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Teaching Brief

A Critical Dialogical Approach to Teaching Public Relations Students Intercultural Competence

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ABSTRACT

Facing a highly globalized and diversified market, public relations students should acquire intercultural competence before entering the industry. This article proposes to use a critical dialogical approach (Freire, 2000) to public relations education to foster students' intercultural competence. Key steps in this innovation and a sample assignment designed with it are provided to illustrate the use of this teaching method in public relations education.

KEYWORDS: Public relations education, critical dialogical approach, intercultural competence

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Introduction

Globalization creates a huge need for public relations students and practitioners to achieve intercultural competence. Although various courses such as *Intercultural Communication and Intercultural/ International Public Relations* are offered in universities to foster this competence, the public relations industry continues to be concerned with students lacking a true multicultural perspective and intercultural competence (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). To tackle this issue, we suggest adopting the critical dialogical approach developed by Paulo Freire (2000).

This approach aligns with the traditional service-learning/client-work approach to public relations education (Texter & Smith, 1999). And it exposes students to real-world cultural issues and allows them to immerse themselves in different social and cultural realities. In addition, it helps students transform themselves from tactics-driven rote learners to active cultural participants. It challenges them to use public relations to resolve cultural issues, which raises students' intercultural competence.

Rationale

Intercultural competence is important to public relations practitioners and students because an increasingly globalized and diversified world market needs it badly (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Taylor, 2001; Tsetsura, 2011; Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). More importantly, one of the core elements of intercultural competence, developing relationships with individuals and groups across cultures (Deardorff, 2009), speaks to the core value of public relations: relationship development and maintenance (Cutlip et al., 1994). Other elements of intercultural competence include the ability to understand the context and connectedness of different cultures, to transcend boundaries and transform differences, and, most importantly, to respect each other (Deardorff, 2009).

Courses such as *Intercultural Communication and Intercultural/ International Public Relations* are offered to foster intercultural competence. Unfortunately, in these classes, students tend to view culture as fixed in history, or predetermined (Halualani, 2011). Somewhat useful, still, this view has prevented students from understanding multiple cultural contexts, and from establishing connections with different cultures (Gallicano, 2013; Munshi & Edwards, 2011). In this view, culture was perceived as a value-neutral commodity distant from and irrelevant to them. In addition, cultural differences are depicted as problems that need to be resolved and overcome or differences that need to be toned down and assimilated (Sobre, 2017). Hence, it is difficult for students to transform the cultural barriers into bonds, to genuinely respect differences, and to build relationships of mutuality with individuals and groups across cultures.

To tackle this issue, public relations scholars (Gallicano, 2013; Munshi & Edwards, 2011; Tstetsura, 2011) have urged educators to employ a multidimensional approach that connects culture and diversity with larger social, political, and historical contexts from perspectives of diverse publics to ensure students are able to comprehend the multifaceted nature of the underlying concepts. Specifically, Tstesura (2011) suggested that educators and students should explore cultural identities beyond the pre-existing categories such as race, gender, ethnicity or national heritage, and examine the individual's experiences via relationship-building process. In addition, Gallicano (2013) identified common problems such as using colorblind and genderblind approaches in agencies' public relations practices; accordingly, she and other scholars (Brown et al., 2011; Tstetsura, 2011) encouraged educators to use diverse teaching methods such as videos, class discussions, and guest speakers to break the cultural barriers. Furthermore, culturally sensitive assignments centered around language accommodation can facilitate the multidimensional approach in public relations education. For instance, Flowers (2020) developed a social media writing assignment for training students to accommodate international English-speaking populations' cultural traditions when creating online content for a fictitious client. The assignment enabled students to be considerate when using U.S.-centered idioms and to apply culturally sensitive verbal and visual content that avoids ethnocentrism and othering. With the current effort, students' intercultural competence could be enhanced through the process of relationship-building, macro-level cultural immersion, and cultural accommodation assignments.

As a continuum, we suggest that adopting a critical dialogical approach (Freire, 2000) to public relations education offers a great opportunity to help students acquire intercultural competence. This approach stems from a critical-pedagogy perspective, which addresses cultural issues in a macro-context, whether historical, social, or political, as well as examining the power, relevance, and hidden or destabilizing aspects of cultures (Martin & Nakayama, 2000). By showing students the big picture of cultural issues, this approach facilitates a holistic understanding of the broader cultural contexts of these issues and the issues' connections with the society at large.

Secondly, this approach advocates for participatory learning in public relations education, aligning it with the service-learning/client-work approach to teaching (Texter & Smith, 1999) to make the adoption smooth. Thirdly, this approach can be applied to any public relations course, so that learning intercultural competence is not confined only to culture-related courses but could become widespread in public relations programs.

Critical Dialogical Approach

According to Freire (2000), a critical dialogical approach has three pillars. The first one is the reconfiguration of the student-teacher relationship, resolving the contradiction by recognizing that knowledge is not deposited from the teacher to the student but is formed through dialogue. Compared to a top-down “banking” (deposit-withdrawal) model critiqued by several scholars (Freire, 2000; Sobre, 2017) for its rigidity and lack of reflexivity, a dialogical approach encourages the co-formation of knowledge from conversations between teachers and students.

The second pillar is participatory learning by students grounded in their individual experience and circumstances in relation to social-cultural issues. This pillar aligns with the service-learning/client-work teaching in public relations education. The difference is that the critical dialogical approach specifically grounds students in cultural issues and challenges students to apply public relations knowledge to resolve the issues, so students can immerse themselves in specific cultures to understand them comparatively and critically.

The third pillar is transformative learning in self-reflection. Reflection on their own processes and those of others encourages students to question their previous assumptions and knowledge. This process moves them to a deeper understanding of what others experience and believe and how to connect with it. Through reflection, students can identify multidimensional power relations associated with a cultural issue, navigate the ambiguity and complexity, and ultimately transcend and transform differences between cultures through dialogue and self-reflection.

Adopting the Critical Dialogical Approach

The adoption of this approach to public relations education to foster students’ intercultural competence takes three steps, reflected in the three pillars mentioned above.

Step One: Focus on Non-Dominant Cultural Groups

The first and most critical step involves selecting a client with a project that can provide intercultural learning experiences. Instructors should look for organizational clients that serve non-dominant cultural groups such as immigrants, LGBTQ+ communities, persons with disabilities, or senior citizens. Selecting such clients would enable students to understand the complexity of power relationships in any given cultural issue by using a critical perspective. If implementing this approach in a senior level course, the instructor should encourage students to seek clients by themselves, which in turn helps students build direct connections with the local community.

To start, the instructors/students work with the client to identify a key intercultural challenge. This could be a lack of meaningful communication or contact between the non-dominant cultural group and the dominant one, or misunderstandings and biases in the society at large towards this non-dominant group. In this way, student participation is galvanized by enacting real scenarios for learning.

Step Two: Foster a Dialogical Learning Environment

Second, a dialogical learning environment should be facilitated when discussing the intercultural challenge. In this environment, instructors should be the facilitators of the conversation, instead of an authoritarian leader. Students should be encouraged to pose questions and share concerns or voice their (mis)understandings regarding cultural issues they have difficulty comprehending. In this way, a reconfiguration of the student-teacher contradiction (Freire, 2000) can actually occur. It is important to note that fostering a safe and civil classroom environment is critical for the successful execution of this approach. Some ground rules should be established, such as respect everyone's right to speak, listen first, respond, and use civil language.

Step Three: Conversations with the Client

Third, the client should be invited to sit in with the class at least twice. The first time should involve the client briefing students. The second time should involve the client evaluating student work. Although inviting a client into classrooms is common for any client-work/service-learning approach, for critical dialogical approach, it should be emphasized that the client should be focused on the cultural aspect of the project. In addition to the two in-class conversations, students should be encouraged to meet with clients outside of the classroom to better understand and serve their needs. Some small tasks should be implemented to encourage such interaction. For instance, the instructor could require each student group to meet (virtually or physically) with the client at least twice throughout the project. The meetings are intended at helping students to: 1) establish relationships with the client and better understand their needs; and 2) seek suggestions and feedback from the client. These meetings should be recorded, and meeting minutes should be submitted as a part of the assignment. It is ideal if the client can be in communication with the students throughout the project; however, it is not required. Through communication with the client, students' understanding of the cultural issue in question can be reinforced and misunderstandings can be challenged or resolved, so that self-reflection can be realized. It is also beneficial to invite different representatives of the client to visit the class, as it can teach students that even within a given culture, different people have different perspectives.

The following outlines a specific assignment adopting this approach. The instructors' observations are shared to illustrate the way this approach can foster intercultural competence.

Implementation: Sample Assignment

We designed an assignment in partnership with a local community organization serving residents of a city's Chinatown. It was a major assignment in a *Strategic Social Media for Public Relations* course for third-year public relations majors. The project lasted three weeks, and students worked in small groups.

The key learning objectives were: 1) to understand cultural issues within the larger structure of the macro-context (governmental, institutional, legal, and economic) and grasp the mediating forces that affect micro-acts such as small-group and interpersonal cultural encounters; 2) to develop skills in communicating with the client serving a non-dominant culture and understanding the cultural issue critically; 3) to develop an effective and culturally appropriate social media fundraising plan that demonstrates understanding of and respect for the culture.

Background of the Client and Project

The organization serves the local Chinatown. This Chinatown has more than a 100-year history and was first developed when Chinese railway workers came to the city (Sciban & Wang, 2013). It established and preserved Asian heritage in the city while becoming a cultural interface for the interconnection of many diverse cultures. The cultural conflict in question occurred in 2018, when the city development authority approved a development permit (Vaessen & Gallichan-Lowe, 2018) that contradicted official guidelines for Chinatown's development. The development of two 27-story towers in the heart of Chinatown did not fit this unique cultural and historical environment. It threatened to limit Chinatown's revitalization by increasing traffic enough that it would pose a significant risk to pedestrians and by restricting access of visitors in the elimination of street parking. Due to these detriments, legal action had to be taken for the future of the community. The client sought to raise money for legal fees to appeal the development permit. The intercultural challenge the client faced was persuading the public that irresponsible development in Chinatown is detrimental to the community on the micro- and macro-scale, including to much of the rest of the city.

Week One: Posing the Problem

In the first week, a representative of the client, a Chinese-descended Canadian, met with the class to present the challenge. He introduced the unique historical and cultural background of Chinatown. He also shared the issue's background -- gentrification without considering those it displaces -- to the students, explaining why Chinatown was against this development.

After the client's visit, students were excited and motivated by the project. Students shared their experiences and understanding of Chinatown. At the end of the first week of class, students were encouraged to further investigate the issue and bring any questions they had to the second week's class.

Week Two: Analyzing the Cultural Issue through Dialogue

In the second week, the instructor organized the class in a dialogical manner, guiding students through the development of the social media fundraising plan. When discussing their understanding of the case, many students struggled to grasp that "development" could be a problem for Chinatown. Based on their own research, many believed that economic development was just what Chinatown needed. Without telling students about any harm from gentrification, the instructor encouraged them to voice any disagreements or confusion. Most students said that economic development might not be a threat to Chinatown. A small number were able to identify the cultural problem behind the economic problem. The instructors encouraged students holding different views to discuss them and guided this process.

After several rounds of discussions and conversations, the class tentatively concluded that there were three main problems: 1) the new development would directly threaten the cultural and historical inheritance of Chinatown; 2) the development would negatively influence the lifestyle of Chinatown residents, who are predominately seniors on foot; and 3) the changes would overpopulate Chinatown, bringing more traffic than it could handle and would eventually hinder its development. Students mapped out unequal power relationships among the city, the developer, and the residents. Most students gained perspective when they examined the development plan from the point of view of Chinatown's residents.

They used the remaining class time and off-class time to work on the fundraising plan and prepared for their presentation in the coming week.

Week Three: Enhancing Intercultural Competence Through Action and Reflection

In the third week, the client sent three members of the organization to the in-class presentation. The representatives and instructor provided feedback for each group's presentation. Eleven fundraising plans were presented. Visitors were highly impressed with the students' ability to use social media as a fundraising tool, and more importantly, students' intercultural competence. For example, prior to the day of the presentation, one group emailed the instructor and asked if using a fortune cookie as a channel to convey the message would offend the client. Students understood that fortune cookies originated in North America. Another group double-checked with the instructor to see if they had pronounced the Chinese word "hongbao" (red envelope) correctly. They were genuinely concerned that the client might be upset if they mispronounced it.

Student presentations also demonstrated the intercultural competence they developed through this project. First of all, the visual aids most students used were in red and yellow, which symbolize Chinese culture in a broad sense. This choice was appreciated by the client. Secondly, students integrated cultural elements in their plan. For example, several groups mentioned using the traditional idea of *Red Envelope* to send out coupons from Chinatown businesses as incentives for the donation. Some groups mentioned using the Lunar New Year rather than Chinese New Year as a more culturally inclusive strategy to raise awareness of the issue and advertise "Chinatown for Everyone."

Two groups used the traditional Chinese value of respecting seniors, which had never been taught in class, as the main message for the fundraising campaign. Students explained that Chinatown was home to many seniors. Caring for and respecting elders was at the core of Pan-Asian culture. Their campaigns advocated that the value of filial piety should be recognized across cultures -- because every family has seniors. The transcendence of cultural differences is achieved here. The client commented that these two groups understood the deeper layer of Chinatown culture and bridged it with the wider Canadian cultures. Based on the feedback and comments from the client in week three's class, students revised their plans and submitted the final version.

The fundraising campaign began a few weeks after students submitted their plans for the campaign. Several suggestions from students have been accepted and implemented, as evident in Chinatown's "Go-Fund-Me" page and its social media accounts across different platforms.

Assessment

Assessment Guidelines

The assessment of any assignment using this approach needs to evaluate two different issues: 1) students' intercultural competence; and 2) students' ability to translate intercultural competence into public relations practices. Specifically, each assignment/project should be evaluated on the students' ability to accomplish the following: 1) to demonstrate understanding and respect for the culture and the culture's issues; 2) using public relations knowledge and theory to develop a culturally respected and effective plan/campaign to address the cultural issues raised by the client; 3) based on the developed plan/campaign, to deliver a culturally appropriate and effective presentation to the client. It is also important to include the client in the assessment process.

Assessment of the Sample Assignment

The assignment above counted for 25% of the total grade, the social media fundraising plan 20%, and the presentation 5%. Both the instructor and the client graded the plans and presentations. The client was instructed to focus on the cultural appropriateness and feasibility of the plan and presentation, while the instructor focused on the public relations perspective (the client received a grading rubric from the instructor). The final marks were the average of the client's and the instructor's (50/50).

Measuring Intercultural Competence in Future Assignments

Due to the time constraint on the sample assignment, students' intercultural competence was not measured beyond the client's qualitative feedback. For future assessments, students' intercultural competence should be measured to ascertain if this approach is successful. There are several ways to gauge students' competence development. For example, a pre-and post-test of students' intercultural competence can help both students and the instructor to assess the effectiveness of this approach. Valid scales can be used, for instance, the Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (BASIC) (Koester & Olebe, 1988), the Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) (Fantini, 2006), and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, 2012). In addition, a reflection paper from students examining their intercultural competence development through the project can provide qualitative insights of students' learning journey (Deardorff, 2011).

Conclusion

To foster intercultural competence, applying a critical dialogical approach to public relations education provides opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience working with a client from a non-dominant culture on a cultural challenge.

We suggest taking this approach with junior or senior classes. This way students will have a solid foundation with which to understand the macro- and micro-processes of culture and public relations. We mentioned earlier that the target organizational clients are those who serve non-dominant cultural groups. However, considering many universities in North America are located in small towns with limited clients from/serving non-dominant groups, we suggest seeking groups or organizations within the university as clients, such as the Office of Inclusion and Diversity, the Office of Indigenous Affairs, and various student organizations/clubs serving non-dominant student demographics (e.g., Chinese students association or first-generation college students club). Another alternative is to obtain clients online. For example, the United Nations has an online volunteering program (https://www.onlinevolunteering.org/en) providing a list of organizations that need volunteers who can work remotely. By utilizing this list, the instructor/students can find a variety of organizations in need of volunteers, while also meeting the need to serve non-dominant groups in the process.

This approach could be used in a variety of public relations courses. A *Writing* course could use it to develop media materials for a nondominant cultural group. A *Public Relations Management* course or a *Capstone Public Relations* course could adopt this approach and ask students to develop a campaign for a nondominant cultural organization. The critical dialogical approach also can be used in other service-learning public relations courses, such as *Public Relations Campaigns*. The approach enables students to apply their knowledge and theories in an intercultural context and become a capable candidate for jobs in public relations.

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Teaching Brief

Captioning Social Media Video

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that the majority of Facebook users typically watch videos with the audio off and often skip over videos that require them to turn on audio, particularly when users are on a mobile device. To counter this tendency, content creators need to caption their social media videos. In many cases, content creators should also be captioning their video because of legal accessibility requirements, particularly if they are producing content for educational institutions or government agencies. In the U.S., these laws might include the Americans with Disabilities Act and Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. This article offers instructions for preparing captions for videos distributed on social media, including guidance on writing quality captions, using captioning tools, and suggested classroom activities.

KEYWORDS: Accessibility, captions, ethics, public relations education, teaching

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Captioning Social Media Video

Ethics is a critical component of public relations (PR) education and interviews with leading PR professionals suggest there are gaps in the ethical components of PR education (Bortree, 2019). While there is little discussion in the PR education literature about making content accessible to people with disabilities, accessibility fits into the Commission on Public Relations Education's call for incorporating ethics across the curriculum, including the need for students to be knowledgeable in making information accessible, respect for others, and acting in the public interest (Bortree et al., 2019). Accessibility is important to the general public. The presence of website accessibility credentials can positively affect public perceptions of company corporate responsibility (Katerattanakul et al. 2018). There have also been broader calls for incorporating accessibility, including captioning, into the mass communication and PR curricula (Youngblood et al., 2018).

Why Teach Captioning?

Social media (SM) is a critical PR element and PR students need skills in SM tools and practices that help them effectively reach their target audience (Kinsky et al., 2016). Video is an important part of the PR SM toolbox and students should understand how to make video accessible. Captioning, onscreen-text describing a video's audio component (Federal Communication Commission [FCC], 2018), is an important element of that process. Captioning makes sense from an ethical perspective because messaging needs to be inclusive. Almost 8 million Americans are deaf or hard of hearing (DHoH) (Brault, 2012) and captioning allows DHoH audience members to participate in the video culture. In silent films, dialogue appeared as on-screen text, so DHoH only missed music played along with the film. Sound-based movies, introduced in 1927, disenfranchised DHoH and captioned films in the US did not appear until 1951. US television captioning began with WGBH's 1972 captioned version of Julia Child's The French Chef, which relied on open captions—text that is an integral part of the film/video and viewers cannot turn off (Downey, 2008). Broadcasters soon switched to closed captions, captions viewers can turn on and off, a technique that can also be used for SM video.

Captioning SM video prevents disenfranchising DHoH SM users and also makes sense based on how many people use SM video. Around 85% of users consume SM video with the audio muted (Patel, 2016) and SM platforms, particularly Facebook, stress captioning's importance in meeting audience expectations (Facebook for Business, n.d., 2016). Captioning offers benefits when the audio is not muted as well. Dual-coding theory argues people absorb information better when presented simultaneously in multiple modalities (Paivio, 1990) and captioned video has broad societal benefits among the non-DHoH population, including promoting language acquisition and increasing literacy. Captioning helps with recall. Students retain information better when they watch videos with captions and, more importantly from a PR perspective, people have better brand recall when watching captioned material (Gernsbacher, 2015). Closed captioning improves search engine optimizations (SEO) as search engines can crawl the caption files. Search engines cannot read open captions (3Play Media, n.d.).

Many organizations fall under online-accessibility mandates, particularly government agencies and schools (Youngblood et al., 2018). Federal laws addressing captioning include:

- Television Decoder Circuity Act (1990): requiring televisions have closed caption circuitry;
- Telecommunications Act of 1996: established broadcast caption requirements;
- Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act: required government and education electronic media accessibility;

- Twenty-First Century Communication and Video Accessibility Act (2010): required increased online video captioning.

While the 1990 Americans with Disability Act (ADA) was designed for the brick-and-mortar world, in 2012, federal judge Michael Ponsor extended it to the virtual world in the National Association for the Deaf's captioning lawsuit against Netflix, making it all the more important that PR students understand captioning (Youngblood et al., 2018).

This combination of ethical and legal imperatives, coupled with user preferences, argues that understanding captioning should be an integral part of teaching PR students about SM video. This article provides background material to help set up an introductory lesson in captioning, including captioning best practices, multiple approaches to creating captions, and outlining a captioning assignment and how to assess it. The article assumes students already have a basic understanding of working with timeline-based media.

Captions and Creating Quality Captions

Captioning is not just repeating on-screen dialogue. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) offers a captioning framework: captions should be accurate, synchronized with the video, complete (all voices and important sounds captioned), and well placed—not obscuring important information (FCC, 2018). If you watch captioned video, you will find that captioning practices vary. For this article, we are drawing on The Described and Captioned Media Program's (n.d.) *Captioning Key*. If only one person is speaking, captioning can be relatively easy—make sure that the captions match exactly what is said, typically including grammatical errors and 'errs' and 'ums.' With the exception of live television captions, most closed-captioned text should be sentence case, with all uppercase indicating someone is speaking loudly. When additional voices are added, captioners may need to add identifiers to clarify who is speaking, putting the name in parentheses and the spoken text on the next line:

(Fred)

Aunt Linda, how to great to hear from you.

Again, conventions vary, as it would not be uncommon to see this caption written on a single line. Important background sounds may need to be captioned, typically setting the sound inside brackets, such as an engine revving up being [engine revving]. Off screen sounds can also be important. If a person looks up when an off-camera door is heard closing, the sound should be captioned [door closes]. Music should be captioned. Examples include [music] and captioning the music's tone [relaxing music]. In the captions shown in Figure 3, the lyrics for the background music were included because they were important to the video's content. The captions identify the artist and the song [*The Newbeats play "Bread and Butter"*] and mark the lyrics with a musical note—♪—at the beginning and end. The key is making sure captions convey all important audio information. Viewers also need to know when there is not any audio for the video [no audio] or unexpected quiet [silence] (Described and Captioned Media Program, n.d.). Captioners need to be careful how they format caption text, and the readability section of Table 1 provides some highlights based on *Captioning Key* (Described and Captioned Media Program, n.d.)—an article that can be used as a reading assignment. Readers interested in a deeper dive into captioning should read Reading Sounds (Zdenek, 2015) and Closed Captioning (Downey, 2008).

Closed captions work by pairing a video file with a text-based caption file. There are over 30 closed captioning formats (3Play Media, n.d.). U.S. students will most likely use SubRip (.SRT) and the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Video Text Tracks (WebVTT or .VTT) and need to be aware of which format a given SM platform supports. These text files provide media players with caption text and how long to display the captions. The captions below are from an .SRT for a documentary on the first Apollo moon landing. The number at the beginning of each section identifies the order of the captioning segment. The paired set of numbers on the next line tells the player when to display the caption that follows. These numbers are written in hours: minutes: seconds: milliseconds.

```
4
00:00:10,500 --> 00:00:12,900
(Houston)
We copy you down Eagle.

5
00:00:13,000 --> 00:00:16,700
(Tranquility Base)
Houston, Tranquility Base here.

6
00:00:16,800 --> 00:00:18,400
The Eagle has landed.
```

In some cases, the final set of time code digits may indicate a frame number and set off by a semicolon rather than comma. As an example, 00:00:04;18 describes the 18th frame after the four-second mark. Be careful when editing captioning files in a text editor to make sure the correct number of digits are present or the media player may not render the caption correctly. .VTT code is similar, but uses a period rather than comma to separate seconds and milliseconds, e.g., 00:00:47.564 --> 00:00:49.49 and has the option to include formatting and placement information (W3C, 2019). As .VTT and .SRT are text documents, they can be created in a basic text editor such as Notepad. The process is easier with a captioning tool, whether built into the platform like Facebook’s or a standalone tool, like Kapwing's.

Bringing captioning into the classroom

This captioning assignment was used in an upper-level video production class that included PR majors. The students responded well to the assignment and reported gaining an appreciation of what captions bring to audience members and the effort it takes to create quality captions. The assignments objectives are 1) to understand the ethical responsibility of making media content accessible, 2) to learn the importance of captioning video content, 3) to understand captioning best practices, and 4) to acquire the skills to use captioning tools. Students should learn to include captions as soon as they begin planning and producing SM video and need to understand which captioning type to use. Facebook and Twitter support closed captioning, while Instagram does not and needs open captions. Captioning is particularly important to integrate into client-based projects where students have the opportunity to serve as captioning advocates, helping educate clients about best practices. When setting up the captioning assignment, students need to understand why captioning is important. In addressing this issue, the instructor should discuss

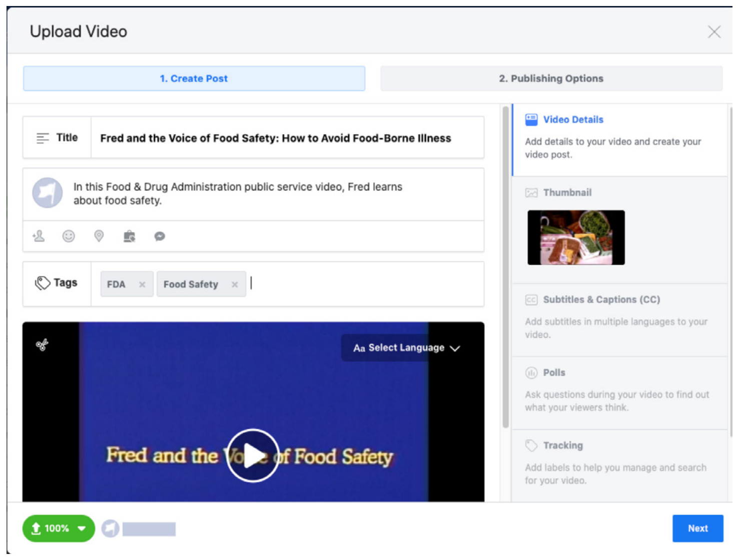
- Ethical imperatives for inclusive design and meeting the all users' needs;
- Legal requirements for inclusive design and captioning, particularly for government and educational institutions (Sections 504 and 508) and the federal court's 2012 application of ADA to the virtual world;
- Meeting user captioning expectations, particularly for mobile devices;
- Added PR benefits, particularly SEO and increased brand recognition when captions are used alongside audio.

Next, the instructor should discuss captioning best practices (see Table 1), including FCC guidelines, and have students watch a muted video and discuss what information they are missing without captions. Crisis/emergency communication is particularly suited for this exercise and encourages discussing ethical and legal concerns. The instructor should then introduce a captioning tool and discuss how to use the tool. We provide discussions of Facebook's captioning tool and Kapwing's Subtitler below (see Table 2 for additional tools). Drawing on captioning best practices, the students should caption 30-seconds of video provided by the instructor. The video should have important background sounds and music, as well as off-camera voices. Depending on time, students can begin with auto-generated captions or be given a script. The instructor should stress that copy-and-pasting the scripted lines is not effective caption. Evaluate student captions using the rubric in Table 1. As an alternative, faculty can use this first attempt at captioning as an opportunity for discussion and have students compare their captioning choices, either in small groups or as a class, and discuss their decisions.

Facebook's Captioning Tool

Facebook auto-plays muted videos as users scroll through their feeds (Constine, 2017), and having a text-version of dialogue helps draw user attention. The captioning tool is not available for personal feeds, so students need to choose their distribution methods carefully. This tutorial covers captioning during upload, but the process is similar when captioning existing video and when adding second-language subtitles. To add video content find the "Video" option in the left-hand menu—you may need to click "See more." On the Video page, upload the video by clicking "Upload Video" and locating your video in the file browser. On the left side of the Upload Video page (see Figure 1), add a title, description, appropriate tags, and the video's spoken language. Select "Subtitles & Captions (CC)" on the page's right-hand side to begin captioning and confirm the video's main spoken language. Facebook offers three options: uploading an .SRT, auto-generating captions, and writing

Figure 1. Upload Video Options

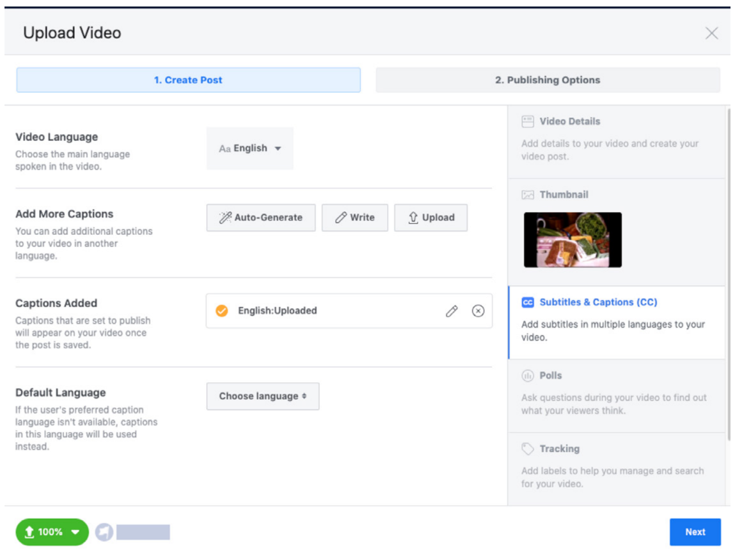


captions. In all three cases, you will probably use the caption editing tool.

You have to use the correct file naming convention when uploading an .SRT: filename.[language code)_[country code].srt. As an example, the filename for *Fred and the voice of food safety* (Food and Drug Administration [FDA], n.d.) might be “fredFoodSafety.en_US.srt,” identifying the SRT as encoded in English as spoken in the U.S. Facebook provides a list of supported language and country codes (Facebook, n.d.). Once you upload the .SRT (see Figure 2), a “Captions Added” box with the text “English:Uploaded” appears with a pencil (edit) and x (delete). Underneath select the default captioning language, which sets a default caption version to show if the user’s preference is not available. You can add additional captions/subtitles in other languages. Watch the video to confirm the captions imported correctly by selecting the pencil (edit). Watch for timing and for encoding problems, such as an apostrophe appearing as â€™. Use the editor to fix any errors.

You can have Facebook auto-generate captions by clicking the Auto-Generate button. The "Captions Added" option will show "English:Autogenerated." The captions will need editing, which you can do by selecting the pencil (edit) option. In addition to fixing mis-transcribed words, add identifiers to show who is speaking and caption important background sounds.

Figure 2. Upload .SRT

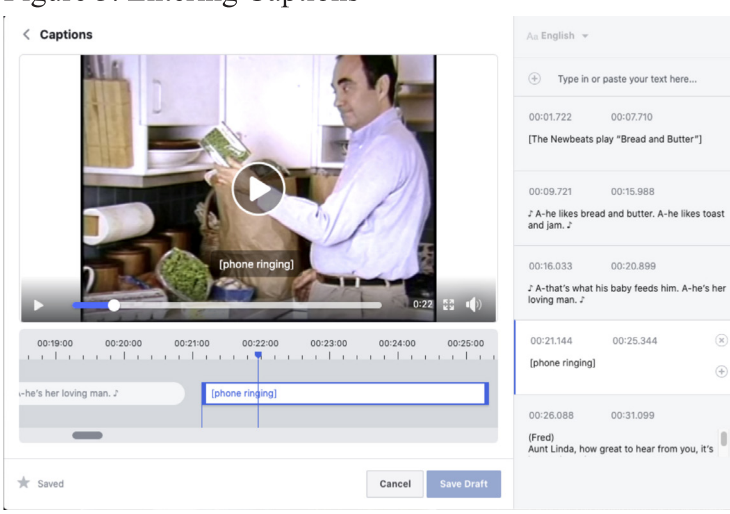


The last option is to create captions from scratch by clicking "Write." This process is easier if you have a script to cut-and-paste text from. When you open the caption editor, it will ask you to select what language the captions are written in. Once you select the language, you will see a list of time markers on the right side of the editor (see Figure 3), including predefined time ranges. The numbers are measured in minutes:seconds:thousandths-of-a-second. You can adjust the numbers by clicking on them, but time spans cannot overlap between clips. To start captioning at the beginning of the video, enter captions in the first time-block, usually starting a half-second into the video. Each time-block represents a single captioning line. As you add lines of text, you will need to adjust the times for each box accordingly. You can adjust a caption's time on screen in the editor underneath the video, clicking on the beginning or end of the blue captioning box and dragging it to the desired time. You can also drag captions around on the timeline, though at the time of this writing, the drag option does not always work correctly.

If you need to add captions after you upload or edit captions, you will need to open your Video Library to get to the caption editor. To get to the editor, follow the Publishing Tools link in the top page navigation bar and then look for the Video Library link in the left-hand navigation. When you hover over a video title, there will be a pencil icon that will let you edit the video. Select the Subtitles & Captions (CC) button to get to the captioning options.

Facebook does not provide an easy way to retrieve the caption file it creates, making it difficult to reuse captions in other applications. Getting the caption file requires opening up the Facebook video in a web browser, using inspect code to find the caption file, opening the file in the browser, copying the text into a text editor, saving it as a .VTT, and converting the .VTT to an .SRT (Mbugua, 2020). Students planning to distribute captioned material on multiple platforms may want to do their initial captioning outside of Facebook, particularly if the videos are more than a few minutes long.

Figure 3. Entering Captions



Kapwing's Subtitler: A dedicated captioning tool

Not all SM platforms provide a built-in captioning tool. Twitter allows for closed captioning and subtitles but requires you upload an SRT. To add an .SRT, go to your Media Studio library, find the Subtitles tab, select the subtitle language, upload, find your .SRT, and select "update file." Some SM platforms, such as Instagram, do not support closed captions, meaning you have to create open captions that are an integral part of the video.

Kapwing's online Subtitle Maker (see Figure 4) lets you create both .SRT and open-caption versions of your video. The free version limits you to projects under seven minutes. As with Facebook, you can upload an .SRT, auto-generate captions, or manually enter captions. This example uses auto-generated captions to create an open-captioned video. Once the source video loads, click the green Auto-generate button and select the video language (see Figure 5). After captions are generated, they need to be edited and timed (see Figure 6). You can edit caption text by clicking into it. You can adjust caption timing by moving the white start and stop circles above the caption text. Be careful that captioning timing between sections do not overlap. Under Text Options on the interface's left side, you can adjust font type, size, color, background, and alignment. Video format depends on your target platform and the Video Options menu can help with the decision making (see Figure 7). Changing the video proportions while using the Fit option, may result in a black border below the video. Using this border space is a popular way to create open captions (see Figure 8). To export an open-captioned video, click the red "CREATE >" button, which will create an open-caption .MP4. If you have a paid account, you can also download the .SRT.

Figure 4. Kapwing's Subtitle Maker

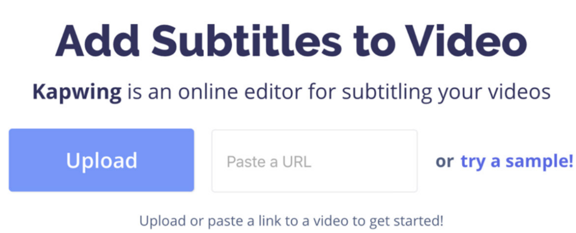


Figure 5. Autogenerating Captions

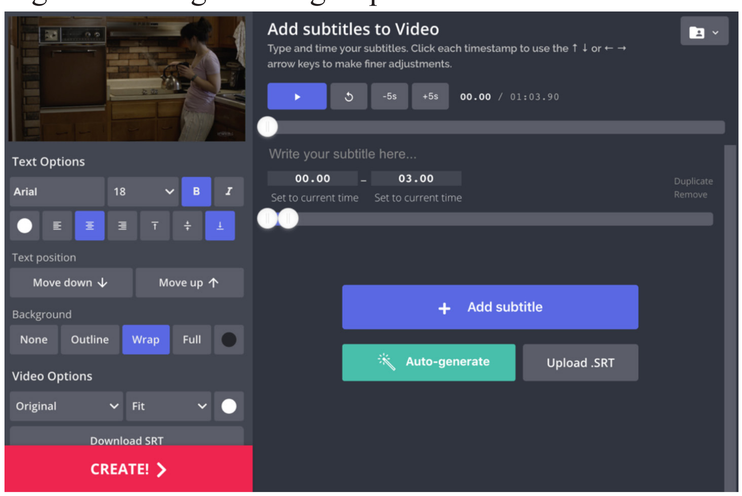


Figure 6. Kapwing's *caption editing interface*

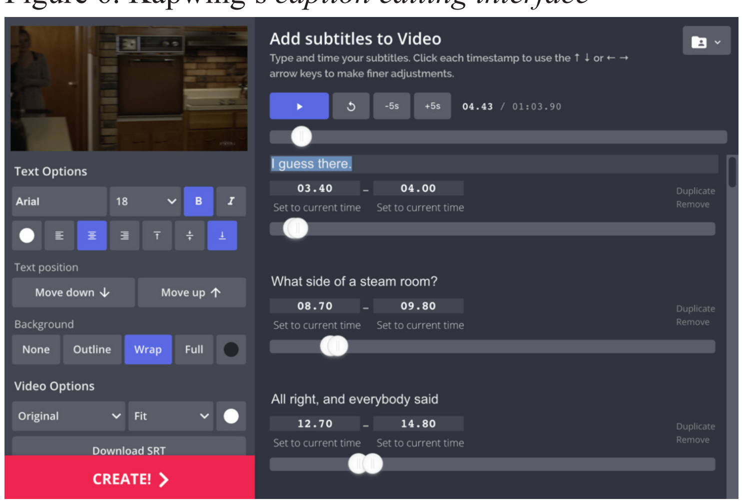


Figure 7. Kapwing's video format options

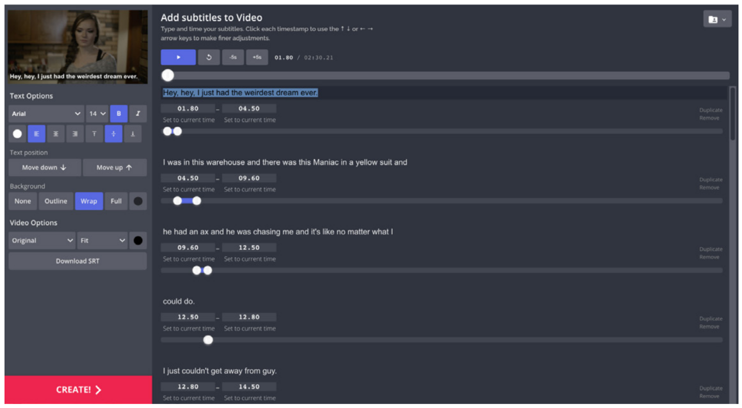
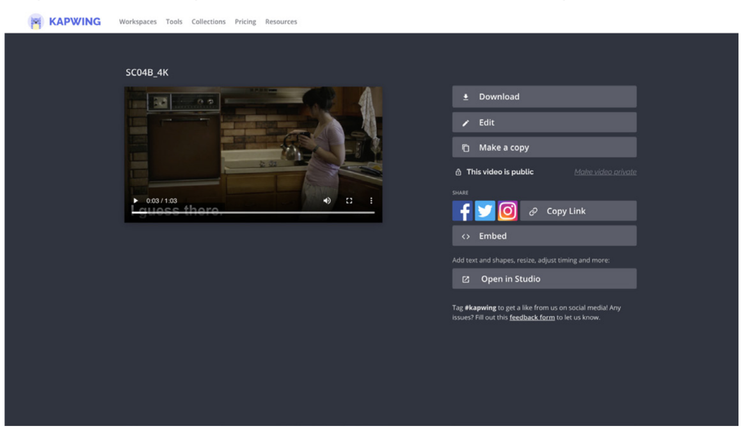


Figure 8. Using border space and publishing



Conclusion

Teaching PR students to create usable captions for SM videos prepares them to meet viewer captioning expectations, meaning their message will more likely reach its audience, particularly on mobile devices. Closed captions improve SEO, making closed captioned videos more findable than non-captioned or open captioned videos. Most importantly, teaching captioning emphasizes ethical best-practices in content accessibility and prepares students to be accessibility advocates.

While this article focuses specifically on captioning SM video, faculty should consider including accessibility more broadly in their teaching—audio podcasting courses might include having students produce transcripts, web design classes should teach students to build accessible websites, and document design courses should include how to create accessible PDFs.

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Table 1. Cpationing Best Practices Rubric

Readability* (20 points)

- Use a sans-serif font (one without extenders) such as Arial, rather than a serif font, such as Times New Roman
- Keep full names (e.g., Fred Jones) on one line
- Keep each caption on screen long enough to easily read—typically 1.33 to 6 seconds
- Keep captions to no more than two lines
- Do not break words or separate words and modifiers when changing lines
- Make sure captions and background have enough contrast. Captions are typically white text on a black or dark background

Accuracy (20 points)**

- Caption dialogue, meaningful background sounds, music, and meaningful silence
- Indicate who is speaking when needed
- Do not paraphrase dialogue
- Only caption important background sounds

Synchronous (20 points)**

- Captions should appear on screen when the sound occurs

Completeness (20 points)**

- Captioning starts when the video begins and stops when video ends

Placement (20 points)**

- Captions should not obscure important visual information
- Pay particular attention to onscreen text that is already in the video

*(Described and Captioned Media Program, n.d.). Captioning Key recommends left-aligned captions, but not all captioning editors/media players support this option. User settings may affect captioning format.

**(FCC, 2018)

Table 2. Captioning Tools

Tool	Cost	Pros	Cons
Facebook Pages	Free	Auto-captions. Built into Facebook.	Can be cumbersome to use. Does not export captions. Does not create open captions.
Kapwing (https://kapwing.com)	Free/ Paid	Creates open and closed captions.	Free version is limited to 7-minute videos. Subscription required to download .SRT file.
Subtitle Horse (https://subtitle-horse.com/)	Free	Free. Allows you to download SRT, VTT and other formats. Includes a mobile friendly version of the software.	No auto-captions. Requires registration. Does not create open captions.
YouTube	Free	Auto-captions. Easy to use. Exports .SRT file.	Can take an hour or more to generate auto-captions. Does not create open captions.

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Teaching Brief

Reflecting on Reflections: Debriefing in Public Relations Campaign Classes

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ABSTRACT

This brief argues for a different perspective when incorporating debriefing exercises in classes such as public relations campaign courses. Grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), this study views debriefing exercises as Kolb's "concrete experience" stage, rather than the traditional approach of debriefings as "reflective observations." Using examples from different campaign classes, the study shows how this change can lead to positive results for students. Additionally, recommendations are provided for implementing this approach.

KEYWORDS: Debriefing, experiential learning

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted to JPRE November 23, 2020. Manuscript accepted for publication February 9, 2021. First published online May 2021.

In a successful experiential learning (EL) situation, students apply knowledge gained from traditional pedagogical methods to real-world situations, thereby expanding their skills through these experiences. Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning identifies four stages of EL. The concrete experience stage incorporates hands-on events where students apply previously learned principles and concepts. Students then review the experience (reflective observation stage), partly to identify any gaps between the student's experience and their understanding of those previously learned concepts. In the conceptualization stage, students reconcile those gaps identified during the reflective observation stage by modifying existing concepts or identifying new ones. Finally, these new/modified principles are applied and tested as part of the active experimentation stage, which can lead to new concrete experiences.

This teaching brief argues for a new approach to one widely-used reflection tool—the debriefing exercise. Debriefing allows participants to "reflect on recent experiences to prepare for subsequent tasks" (Eddy et al., 2013, p. 975). Initially developed as a military exercise, debriefing is now used in a variety of professions (Nicholson, 2013). Despite its wide use, debriefing exercises are not always effective. Potential problems with debriefings include not allocating enough time for the debrief and an imbalance of power between facilitator(s) and participants (Dennehy et al.,1998). These problems generally can be best addressed by the facilitator of the debrief, but other problems require the efforts of both the facilitator(s) and participants. These include "too much focus on task work, telling—not discussing, inadequate focus, and no definitive look forward" (Reyes et al., 2018, p. 48-49).

Additional challenges arise when introducing debriefing exercises to students, who generally have little experience with such exercises. This inexperience impacts students' abilities to effectively contribute to a debrief.

When I first introduced debriefing exercises to a public relations capstone class over seven years ago, I had three objectives for this exercise—students would reflect on the project, gain debriefing experience, and provide feedback about the overall class. While all three objectives might be appropriate, it became clear that it was unrealistic to accomplish them all during a session that may last as little as 20 minutes. As such, it was important to focus on one objective and develop the debriefing with that single objective in mind. Given the students' inexperience with debriefing meetings, I decided that the primary objective of these sessions should be learning, rather than reflecting.

This teaching brief, therefore, proposes that debriefing exercises still be used within the context of an EL class such as a public relations campaigns class, but instead as part of the concrete experience stage, rather than as a reflective observation. With this approach, the emphasis is not to have students reflect on what they have learned (reflective observation), but rather for students to learn how to effectively debrief (concrete experience). This brief recommends steps to take before, during, and after the restructured debriefing exercise (see appendix for a summary of these steps). The paper then provides observations and experiences from the new approach to the debriefing sessions.

Restructuring the Debriefing Session

Before the debrief

Prior to any debriefing, students should receive an in-depth introduction to the concept of debriefing sessions and the "rules of the road." This introduction starts with a lecture highlighting the value of debriefing both in a classroom setting as well as in a professional environment. This introduction stresses two key concepts: First, the debriefing is a "conversation among equals;" everyone's "rank" and ego are left outside of the meeting. As such, it is important that students understand they may direct the conversation as much as the facilitator.

They are encouraged to contribute their thoughts, but also to raise questions and issues they feel are important to examining the team's progress. Second, the introduction encourages students to think in terms of analyzing the team's progression; this is not a meeting to focus on individual successes or limitations.

To augment this explanation, I assign short readings and videos (e.g., Bourke, 2014; Rae, 2017; Sundheim, 2015; Womack, 2015) further explaining the concept. These assignments include both academic and professional perspectives, so students can also see the professional-world applications. I then quiz the students on the assigned materials. The quiz is not for a grade, but the students must pass the quiz in order to attend the debriefing meeting, which is for a grade (typically five percent or less of the student's final grade). Students can take the online quiz an unlimited number of times until they receive a passing grade. In other words, the quiz is not the ultimate objective of this assignment, but it helps instill a sense of accountability among the students while helping them prepare for the debriefing exercise. In addition, if students do not fully understand the reading material, they can see this with their quiz score, and can go back to review the readings before taking the quiz again.

After passing the quiz, students are given questions that could arise during their particular debriefing session, so that they can begin the reflection process. I encourage students not to write out detailed answers to these questions. In previous classes, students prepared written responses to the questions prior to the debrief and used these answers as a script for the meeting. Doing so inhibits the interactive aspects of a successful debrief. Instead, the purpose of providing questions in advance should be to encourage students to formulate their ideas, but not prepare scripted answers for the meeting.

Questions used during a particular session are tailored to each group, reflecting the unique characteristics of each group's project and experiences. The questions focus specifically on the project itself (e.g., what worked, what didn't), rather than reflecting on what students have learned, which would be more appropriate in the reflective observation stage. Sample questions can be found in the appendix and other literature (see Sundheim, 2015). Since the debriefings may only be 20 or 30 minutes long, the questions should be designed to engage students and encourage discussion as quickly as possible.

The Debriefing Meeting

I schedule each team's debrief during one class period, and each team meets separately with me. Therefore, the time spent with each team is only a fraction of the class period, typically 20 to 30 minutes. It is helpful to have a second facilitator in the meeting as this often provides a different perspective of the debriefing meeting

When possible, I schedule the meetings in a conference room rather than a classroom, leaving the classroom available for the other students to continue working in their teams during the other debriefings. This also helps create a more professional setting, leading to a more realistic EL environment.

Since this is a learning—not a reflection—assignment, the quality of a student's reflections is less important to their grade than is their participation during the discussion. One strict requirement which I impose—which students know in advance—is that they be on time for the meeting: Once the meeting begins, being late by even a few seconds results in a 10% deduction to the assignment grade. This reinforces the professional aspect of meeting and emphasizes the importance of being on time in such professional settings.

During the meeting, any prepared questions are just a guide; depending on the way students direct the conversation, unanticipated questions may be more meaningful once the debriefing is underway. The facilitator should be responsive to these dynamics and lead the direction of the discussion accordingly; if the students shift toward a different, but relevant topic, encourage continued discussion. Conversely, if the students begin focusing on extraneous issues (e.g., the class, the curriculum), the facilitator should redirect the focus, most likely by introducing another previously prepared question.

Post-Meeting

During the first class after the debriefing, it is beneficial to spend time recapping the debriefing sessions. In essence, this recap incorporates the "reflective observation" stage of the EL cycle.

Reflections of the debrief should start off by reinforcing the benefits of debriefings within the context of a professional environment. At this point, engage the students to get their thoughts on the debriefing itself. Probing questions can include, "Do you feel that this meeting helped your team focus on the next set of milestones? If so, how? If not, what could you/your team/the facilitator have done during the debrief that would have led to better results?" The important distinction with this meeting (vs. the debriefing meeting) is that now, the students' reflections are not about the capstone project, but rather specifically on the debriefing session. Another benefit to this discussion is that it allows the student to reflect on what they could have done differently as a participant and what they might do in a similar situation as a facilitator.

Discussion

The new approach to the debriefing sessions has been in effect for two years, and most of the sessions have included one facilitator and one outside observer. After the debriefings, the facilitator and observer have met to share their observations. These observations—as discussed below—consistently reflect a greater level of student engagement and a shift in the students' attitudes towards debriefing. Overall, the facilitators/observers have found the "new" debriefings to be beneficial to the quality of students' participation in the meetings. Unless otherwise stated, the discussion below reflects those observations that were noted by all observers.

First, the students seem more engaged in terms of the time they spoke (vs. the facilitator), although all observers agreed there is still room for improvement in this area. Additionally, during the debriefing session, students discussed the underlying project as if it had been a professional work project rather than as a school assignment.

Some of the students have been more proactive in discussing their team dynamics and interaction. In one instance, a student acknowledged she had not been able to attend many of the team meetings due to work commitments and was concerned that her teammates felt she had not contributed sufficiently. The other team members unanimously disagreed, indicating that her contributions had been crucial to the success of the team's final campaign plan. Subsequently, the team's implementation of the plan during the second half of the semester was also successful, and the group's client commented on the enthusiasm and cohesiveness of the students throughout the project.

Students have also demonstrating a greater appreciation for the debriefing process. As an example, students in one particular class participated in the first debriefing during the semester's mid-term, which helped each team approach the final half of their project more cohesively and effectively. As the semester end neared, the students were given a choice: They could each reflect on the semester by submitting a written, one-page reflection paper with their thoughts, or each team could meet for a longer debriefing session (one hour) at the end of the semester. The choice, therefore, offered students an assignment that would require them to return to campus for an in-person group meeting, or to submit an individual assignment online, and avoid any on-campus meeting. Despite the effort required to come to campus and meet for an hour, an overwhelming majority of the class opted for the debriefing session instead of the reflection paper.

During their end-of-semester meetings that the students opted for, I asked students why they preferred an assignment that required them to be on campus at a specific time during finals week, when they could have simply written a one-page reflection and submit it without having to appear in class. Most students responded by focusing on the value gained from the debriefing experience. Some acknowledged the team-building benefits to having this kind of meeting, and indicated they wanted yet another opportunity to get together with their semester-long teammates before ending the term. Reflecting on the debriefing earlier in the term, some students saw the positive impact that the initial meeting had on their team's cohesiveness and interpersonal relationships. Others valued the additional insight from their team members, as indicated by one student who said, "Any chance I can get feedback from my peers or teachers I want to get it."

These examples and observations point to a more successful debriefing experience when used as a learning exercise, rather than a reflection tool. Indeed, there is a reflection component to this EL exercise, but the reflection observation phase is not the debrief itself, so students view the debriefing experience as a learning experience. Students also seem to appreciate the value in debriefing in terms of the impact to the classroom experience (e.g., stronger team dynamics and more meaningful feedback). As such, the new approach to treating the debriefing session primarily as a learning tool seems successful: Students are gaining a better understanding and appreciation of the debriefing process, which should position them to be effective debriefing participants when in a post-collegiate, professional environment.

Indeed, some students have already benefited from the debriefing project in their own post-collegiate, professional experiences. In one case, a recent graduate and former student in the capstone class took an initial job upon graduation at a manufacturing company that held debriefing meetings weekly. Within a few weeks, her manager recognized her contributions and has asked her to participate in an initiative to evaluate the effectiveness of the debriefing meetings, and provide recommendations for improving the company's debriefing processes. It was a positive opportunity that enabled this graduate—a newly-hired employee—to establish solid credentials within her organization and specifically with management.

One challenge that all facilitators/observers noted in the debriefing meetings was the hesitancy for students to raise issues that may expose potential conflicts within the group. Some students have shown a willingness to address their own challenges during the project, but none have proactively raised problems involving other students' performances or problems. In at least two separate classes, teams dealt with significant intra-group challenges and conflicts, but none of the members of these teams raised these issues in any of the debriefing meetings. In fact, in one case, the issues weren't raised at all until students wrote confidential peer assessments of their team members. It is obviously important for students to learn and practice successful techniques regarding raising sensitive issues within the team, so this is an area of the debriefing exercise to further refine.

Conclusion

EL projects offer students the ability to reflect on their learning experiences while developing skills that can be crucial to success in their post-collegiate careers. Debriefing allows for both—to reflect within the context of a situation while challenging students to develop skills that even well-seasoned executives struggle to master. This brief has advocated for refocusing the debriefing from a reflection tool to a learning tool, and identified steps when creating a debriefing exercise that can accomplish this (See Appendix). By positioning the debrief first and foremost as a concrete learning experience, students become better contributors in the debriefing exercise, and ultimately more effective participants in future professional situations.

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Appendix

Before the debriefing:

- Adequately prepare students
  - In-class, explain the debriefing process and benefits.
  - In-class, explain the role of participants and facilitators. Instill the idea that all are equals; there is no hierarchy in the debrief.
  - Outside of class, assign additional resources. (e.g., Bourke, 2004; Guterman, 2002; Sundheim, 2015).
  - Create a sense of accountability with a quiz on the additional resources. The quiz is not the focus of the debrief, so it should not be overly difficult or punitive in nature.
- Prepare questions
  - Questions should follow the nature of typical debriefing questions (e.g., Womack, 2015), but should be tailored to reflect specific dynamics of each team
  - What was your goal? Did you achieve it? What helped you achieve it? What stood in the way of success? What could the team have done to improve results? What should the team keep doing that worked?

During the debriefing:

- Follow prepared questions, BUT…
- Be flexible. If the discussion leads the team to a different topic or issue that is relevant, be able to facilitate and manage the discussion accordingly.

- Use questions to facilitate not to participate.
- As facilitator, guide the process, not the content.

After the debriefing:

- Use part of the first class after the debrief as a time for reflective observation.
- Reinforce the value of the debriefing by noting a few positive outcomes or key points from the debrief meeting.
- Engage students—Ask them their thoughts about the debriefing experience.
    - How does the debriefing meeting help your team going forward?
    - Do you feel differently about debriefing now that you have gone through it? If so, how?
    - How could your debriefing experience help you in the future (beyond the classroom)?
    - What will you do differently in the next debriefing meeting?

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Top PRSA-EA GIFT

Shifting the Paradigm - Improving Student Awareness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts Through Public Relations Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

As PR professors it is our responsibility to make diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) top of mind when teaching our students to develop comprehensive campaigns. It is our role to educate the next wave of practitioners to take the "diversity first" approach when working with clients or organizations. Through learning how to apply the researcher-developed Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for Public Relations Practitioners, this paper illustrates how students can operationalize this tool to build strategic campaigns that encompass DEI principles.

KEYWORDS: Public relations, campaigns, diversity, equity, inclusion, cultural competency

Editorial Record: Submitted to the Educators Academy of the Public Relations Society of America, June 8, 2020. This top paper submission was selected by JPRE in collaboration with PRSA-EA September 17, 2020. First published online May 2021.

Rationale: Through this activity, we seek to shift the paradigm of student awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in and through public relations campaign courses. Through learning how to apply the researcher-developed Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for Public Relations Practitioners, students can then operationalize this tool to build strategic campaigns that encompass diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles. Facilitation of cultural competence through relevant curriculum, such as public relations campaigns, empowers students (Pelletier, 2019) and breaks barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance (Smith, 2019), which in this case applies to creating a "diversity first" approach of examination into, and development of, comprehensive communications campaigns with students.

Targeted Learning Outcomes: 1) students become more comfortable with many of the aspects surrounding DEI, 2) students can demonstrates a deliberate and effective way for addressing various audiences through empathy and consideration of diverse populations using a customized tool built for PR practitioners, 3) students reflect on the importance of application of DEI efforts to campaigns and the field.

Teaching Practice & Assignment: During the first week of class, to help students begin to think critically about DEI issues, we first define diversity, equity and inclusion to set the stage for the semester and open the discussion surrounding the role diversity plays within the field of PR. We propose the following: diversity is the "difference or variety of difference or variety of a particular identity"; equity addresses the "resources and the need to provide additional or alternative resources so that all groups can reach comparable, favorable outcomes;" and inclusion involves the "practices, policies, and processes that shape an organization's culture" (Beavers, 2018, p. 3). Rather than making DEI add-on elements of strategic communication campaigns and messages, practitioners should make conscientious decisions to put DEI considerations at the forefront of their planning. This model can be introduced in introductory level courses, then students can carry the model forward throughout their program of study.

Next, we introduce the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for PR Practitioners (Appendix A). This wheel is based on previous research by Dr. Lee Gardenswartz and Dr. Anita Rowe (1994, 1998). In doing so we teach our students how to develop more inclusive campaigns from the beginning – the "diversity first" approach. Explaining the wheel: the center of the wheel has six core spokes that brands should consider when beginning to develop a campaign - national origin, age, physical qualities/abilities, gender, race and ethnicity. The outer layer of the wheel, beginning at the top and moving clockwise around the wheel includes seventeen additional attributes such as marital status, religious beliefs, mental health/well-being, language, communication styles, thinking styles, education or language. The idea is not to incorporate every spoke or external layer represented in the D&I Wheel, rather to consider deeply whether the same people are continually represented and create a campaign that includes two or three inner spokes and an array of external layers presented here.

Step 1

To begin, students are given a recent PR case study or campaign to read chosen by the instructor. Allow the learners to read the case completely. Instruct them to highlight and make notes that illustrate direct connections to DEI principles. Additionally, students should go online to assess the digital assets available for the campaign. In this step students begin to connect specific areas of DEI to actual campaigns.

Step 2
Hand out a sheet of paper that has an image of a circle in the center of the page with a smaller circle in the center of that or have students take out a piece of paper and draw a circle in the center (Appendix B). Prompt the students to use the D&I Wheel as a guide (Appendix A). In the smaller circle, ask the students to identify at least two aspects from the center of the wheel. In the larger circle ask students to identify at least four aspects from the external portion that they believe were implemented in this case study. In this step, students investigate and identify multiple aspects of diversity, equity and inclusion. Here students begin to understand the importance of multidimensional diversity.

Step 3
Ask students to look up the diversity and inclusion policy of the company featured in the case study. They should analyze the principles of DEI and compare them to the case study they just evaluated. Do the company's mission and values align with the campaigns they are executing? By doing this, students think critically about the messages being sent publicly versus the actions taken internally by organizations. Sometimes the two are at odds with one another.

Step 4
Open the floor to discuss the student findings from the exercise. The learners should provide examples from their discovery to fuel the conversation. Have students explore why certain decisions were made and why (or why not) certain representations are present. This assignment provides a foundation for instructors to use and refer back to often when conducting research, developing content, identifying strategies or planning campaigns. An add on assignment is to have students write their own DEI statements that they can post to their website portfolios using concepts

learned.

Assessment & Student Reactions: Having taught this approach over the past two years, students consistently respond positively. Some comment that this is the first time they have been introduced to the D&I Wheel. Students become more comfortable with aspects of DEI (LO1), a student commented, "This was all new to me. I've never thought about diversity from a communication perspective. Other classes don't use this concept and I wish they would." While another remarked on the importance of application of DEI efforts to campaigns and the field (LO3), "I don't know why this isn't a standard part of learning how to put together an integrated campaign." Others noted that before learning how to incorporate a diversity first approach from the research process throughout, they simply would include photos of diverse people. As a result of this practice, students can demonstrate a deliberate and effective way for addressing various audiences through empathy and consideration of diverse populations using a customized tool built for PR practitioners (LO2), whereas one student commented, "I used to think diversity was just making sure that different color people were in the pics I used for my assignments. Now I know that to really understand diversity we must take what we understand about culture, communication, gender and so much more and apply it to building content." Additional assessment results available in Appendix C.

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Appendix A

Diversity & Inclusion Wheel For PR Practitioners

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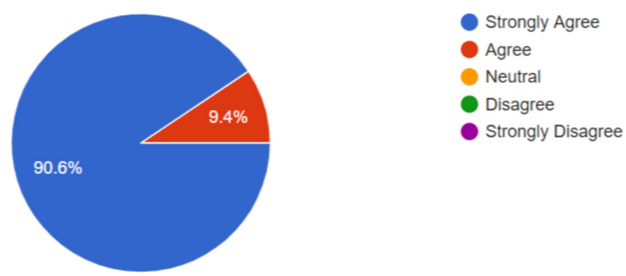
Appendix B

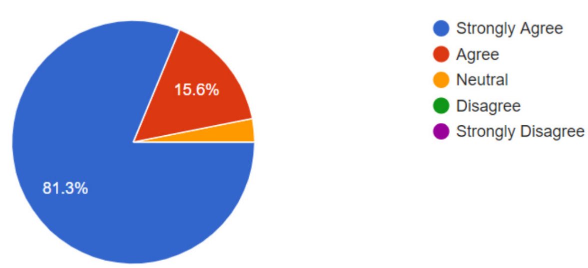
Appendix C

Note: The instructors collected the following pre- and post- test attitudes over two semesters in campaigns courses, below are the results with regard to Student Attitudes and Perceptions of DEI in the PR Classroom.

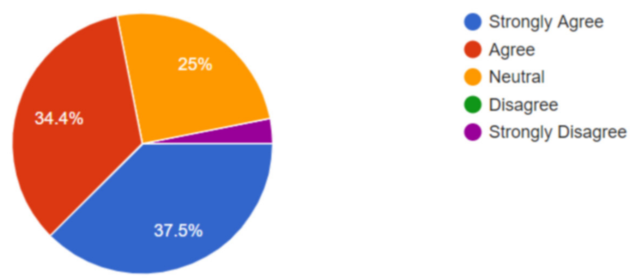
1. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are important to consider while building effective public relations campaigns.



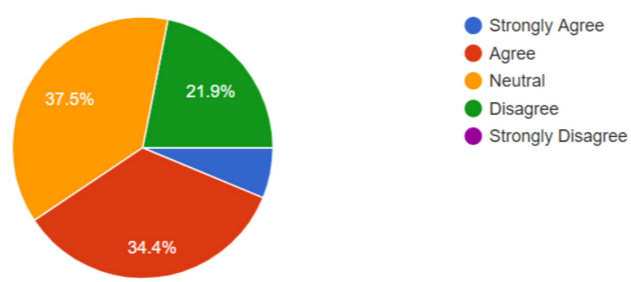
2. Diversity, equity, and inclusion education should be included in all classes related to public relations.



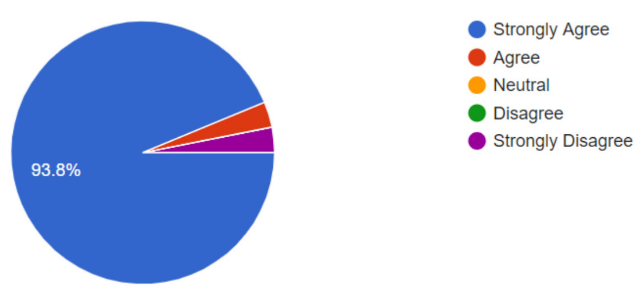
3. I feel prepared to learn and effectively apply new material from textbooks, journal articles, blogs, etc. without classroom review on matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in public relations.



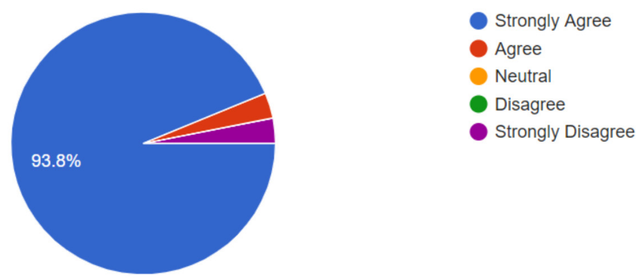
4. I have sufficient background knowledge on diversity, equity, and inclusion related to public relations in order to apply these matters to campaigns successfully.



5. I am open to learning more about how diversity, equity, and inclusion are related to public relations.



6. I wish there were more offered in my public relations curriculum that addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.



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Marilyn: A Woman In Charge

Reviewed by
LaShonda L. Eaddy, Ph.D., APR, Penn State University

Marilyn: A Woman In Charge
Author: Dick Martin
PRMuseum Press, 2020
ISBN: 978-0999024584
https://prmuseumpress.com/collections/frontpage/products/copy-of-marilyn-a-woman-in-charge-hardcover

Women represent more than 60% of the public relations workforce, but only hold 20% of leadership positions in the field (Shah, 2019). Recent social movements such as #MeToo have forced the public relations industry, as well as others, to take a long hard look at gender inequities. Part of the public relations' reckoning has included chronicling the oft overlooked roles that women played in the history and evolution of the industry. In *Marilyn: A Woman in Charge*, Dick Martin, former chief communications officer for AT&T, provides a riveting account of Marilyn Laurie's rise from a volunteer grassroots organizer for Earth Day to being the first woman to join the executive committee of a Fortune 10 company as AT&T's chief communications officer. The book follows Laurie's journey from being a "little Jewish girl from the Bronx" to a trusted and respected advisor for one of America's greatest companies.

Structure and Organization

Martin uses his own experience as Laurie's colleague, archival data and interviews with family, friends and colleagues to provide a firsthand account of Laurie's trailblazing career and a rare insider's view of public relations' role in a large corporation. The book begins by describing Laurie's childhood as a second-generation immigrant and a child determined to chart her own course. The first chapter is dedicated to Laurie's upbringing, education and young adulthood; while the remaining chapters highlight her career trajectory.

Lauries' first public relations purview occurred when she volunteered to help plan and publicize a national day to promote conservation. Laurie's tenacity and intellect helped the grassroots organization launch the first Earth Day and successfully put conservation on the public agenda. Little did she know that her involvement would afford her the opportunity to promote conservation for one of the country's largest employers. Laurie joined AT&T in its ninety fourth year, when it still handled 90% of telephone calls in the U.S. What began as a position to encourage employees to recycle, turned into a 25-year tenure. Each proceeding chapter provides a third-person account of Laurie's life and career intertwined with quotes from her office files, speeches, papers, and oral histories she recorded.

The story of Laurie's rise from rank-and-file employee to executive provides a vivid image of public relations' role in corporate America as well as the treacherous terrain of maintaining a corporate image and reputation. Laurie's unconventional path from a public relations technician to key decision maker highlights the various roles public relations professionals can play within organizations. The book shares the good, bad, and ugly of Laurie's experiences at AT&T. The candid recounts are both interesting and insightful; and are presented in a way that appeals to aspiring public relations pros as well as those who are in the trenches now.

Contributions to Public Relations Education

Laurie's story is one of triumph and defeat, thus providing a realistic depiction of life as a resilient professional and leader. The book provides real world examples of public relations' multi-faceted functions, including community relations, media relations, crisis management, investor relations, internal communication, development, change management, executive communication, strategic planning and succession planning to name a few. It also shows the roles public relations professionals can play such as, advisor, boundary spanner and serving as companies' "peripheral vision". According to Laurie, "the purpose of public relations is to bring the policies and practices of an institution into harmony with the needs and expectations of the public. Sometimes that means persuading the public that the institution is doing the right thing; sometimes it means persuading the institution to change its behavior" (Martin, 2020; 304).

Laurie's story also demonstrates higher-level insight into developing an organizational mission, vision and goals; differentiating the organization; interacting with the dominant coalition; knowing your organization's business; demonstrating business acumen and professional expertise; obtaining a "seat at the table;" remaining vigilant and willing to challenge ideas and policy; facilitating organizational and crisis learning, and ensuring the organization is following the values it espouses. Laurie's story also has an underlying theme that demonstrates how being open to opportunities and being courageous enough to go into unchartered territory can greatly impact one's career trajectory.

This book is a great resource for public relations students and pros alike. The book can supplement an introductory public relations text by providing examples of public relations roles in various contexts. It can also be used in a public relations administration or public relations management class to explore the nuances and intricacies of serving in leadership roles within a corporation. The book also delves into the various stages of crisis management, which also would make it appropriate for a crisis management class. The book could also be used in a seminar class to help students learn about the innerworkings of corporations and the public relations function. Novice and seasoned public relations professionals and public relations educators can also benefit from the account of the consummate public relations professional.

The book also provides an example of a leader exiting a role on their own terms, and finding new purpose after. The book concludes with Laurie's last months of life; and her introspection and reflection as she reconciled her own mortality. While this recount was sad, it also serves as inspiration and sage advice for readers to ponder. Overall, I think *Marilyn: A Woman in Charge*, could greatly contribute to any public relations curriculum because of the insight it provides.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The major strength of this book is Laurie's captivating story of rising through the ranks of a Fortune 10 company and defying the odds by becoming an executive. Martin shares Laurie's story in vivid detail; incorporating her thoughts, feelings, ideals and beliefs throughout. These inclusions allow readers to get an insider's view and connect with Laurie as if she was recounting her own story. While the book does a wonderful job chronicling Laurie's career and her ascent to break many glass ceilings, the book does not discuss her life outside of work beyond mentioning her spouse and children seldomly. As readers follow Laurie's career, they likely would wonder if Laurie's ambition took a toll on her personally, but this is not addressed until the book's conclusion. At first Martin seems remiss to omit this integral perspective, however he dedicates an entire chapter to discuss the implications of gender stereotypes and differing perceptions of women's roles. He also uses this opportunity to share Laurie's own reflections regarding how her career impacted her roles as wife and mother. By this point in the book, readers are also likely to realize that Martin is remaining true to Laurie's character and outlook by addressing these issues separately from her career trajectory. The chapter also provides a candid outlook on the challenges of working mothers and the current practices regarding support services for them.

I truly enjoyed reading this book and learning about one of public relations' trailblazers. I am confident that students would enjoy reading Laurie's story and could make connections with the book, course content and their career aspirations. I plan to use this book as a companion piece in my Principles of Public Relations course. If you are interested in reading an excerpt from the book, visit the PRMuseum Press website. Martin also developed a discussion guide that provides questions and assignments for each book chapter. The guide is free and available for download on the PRMuseum Press website.

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Carter G. Woodson: History, The Black Press and Public Relations

Reviewed by
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Carter G. Woodson: History, The Black Press and Public Relations
Author: Burnis R. Morris
University Press of Mississippi, 2017
ISBN: 978-1-4968-2013-6

How many people know the story behind this national observance of Black History Month each February? Black History Month began as a celebration of Negro History Week nearly 100 years ago. The man who started it all, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, is also linked to the field of public relations. Henry Louis Gates' (2017) *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro* included an article answering the question, "How did Black History Month come into being?" Gates (2017) called Woodson's creation of Negro History Week, which was to take place during the second week of February, a "public relations coup" (p. 267). Newspaper article about Negro History Week began running in January 1926, which was the first year of the observance organized by the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), an organization Carter G. Woodson formed.

In telling the story of Black History Month, Gates (2017) also mentioned an editorial that Woodson wrote about what was known about the accomplishments of Black Americans and what was taught on those accomplishments in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. That editorial was published in *The Chicago Defender*, one of the most widely read Black-owned newspapers. The opinion piece exemplified the articles used in the development of another book, which we review here.

Burnis Morris' most recent treatment on Carter G. Woodson shines the spotlight on his strategic communications work in Black-owned news outlets. *Carter G. Woodson: History, The Black Press and Public Relations* offers a history of the Black Press from 1915 to 1950 while introducing the reader to several functions of the public relations practitioner.

For a public relations educator, Morris' book is an ideal resource to incorporate racially diverse examples into one's class whether the lesson is about public relations writing, public relations campaigns, or media promotion strategies. Besides creating what is known today as Black History Month and its sponsoring organization, ASNLH, Woodson also was the founder of the *Journal of Negro History*. And, though a heart attack claimed his life at the age of 74 in 1950, Woodson brought dramatic changes in attitudes about African American history and culture. Morris' recent book shows us how using public relations tools.

How The Book is Structured

In the fifth of six chapters, "Managing Public Relations," Morris included a table listing eight modern public relations elements and examples used by Woodson, the man known as "Father of Black History." Many of those eight elements (research, media relations, publicity, member relations, fund-raising, minority relations/multicultural affairs, special events, and issues management) were exemplified in the work of Woodson's association, ASNLH, which raised money to print the *Journal of Negro History* and advance the Negro history movement. Along with a section on "Woodson as Publicist," Morrison included a detailed timeline on the 1926 launch of Negro History week using examples from articles in the Black Press.

Elsewhere in the book, Morris opens in Chapter 1 with a background on Woodson's early life in Buckingham County, Virginia where he was born in 1875 one of nine children. The reader gains insight on his development as a scholar including Woodson becoming the second African American to earn a Ph.D. in History from Harvard University (the other person to accomplish that goal was W.E.B. DuBois.). Chapter 2 connects the newspaper history and Woodson's partnership with the Black Press from 1915 to 1950. Then in Chapter 3, he focused on how newspapers covered Woodson from his days as a high school student in Appalachia to a high-profile celebrity in Washington, DC. Morris provides a thematic analysis from the columns in Chapter 4, which spotlights the news and promotional value of Woodson's writings. In the book's closing Chapter 6, Morris details how, at the time of his death, Woodson was one of the most recognizable African Americans in the world. He explains aspects of the Carter G. Woodson legacy and makes a compelling argument for why Woodson's use of modern public relations technique to popularize Black History warrants inclusion in journalism history and public relations books.

Public Relations and The Black Press

The purpose of Morris' book is to explain how Woodson seized opportunities available through the black newspapers—that helped make him a household name and leveraged his celebrity to sell and popularize history. The book is the latest in several media scholars' efforts to spotlight public relations in efforts for racial injustice. For Woodson, the greatest injustice was the dearth of understanding of Negro history. More recently, other scholars like Murphree (2006), who focused on the PR tactics of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Hon (1997) in her research on PR strategies in the overall Civil Rights Movement, offer examples of how to link public relations to topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, a recent study spotlighted public relations, social advocacy and digital communication of the Justice for Trayvon Martin campaign (Hon, 2015).

What sets Morris' book apart is the combination of depth of study on the Black Press and the functions of modern public relations. To complete his study, he reviews more than 500 articles containing hard news stories, features, columns, and editorials in *The Atlanta Daily World*, *Baltimore Afro American*, *Chicago Defender*, *Cleveland Call and Post*, *Louisiana Weekly*, *Negro World*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*. Morris also examined letters and other correspondence such as those he had with Luther P. Jackson, a history professor at Virginia State College who helped raise funds to support Woodson's effort.

Recommendation

Even for those not teaching public relations, Morris' book is a great read because it provides a more complete picture of the Father of Black History. It shows the power of public relations writing in advocating for the complete view of the accomplishments of African Americans. Media historians will find Morris' use of primary sources in his analysis of dozens of letters and hundreds of articles worthy of reference in teaching young scholars how to produce a historical study. Additionally, students of the Black Press will benefit from seeing how these outlets were used in advocacy for education policy change in the years between 1915 and 1950. At the same time, these newspapers also illuminated the agendas of the scholarly association behind The Journal of Negro History. Academic scholars who sometimes struggle with balancing their work as a researcher with their calling for social justice advocacy will find insight in the strategies of Carter G. Woodson, who wrote for their peers reading scholarly journals and the larger community reading Black newspapers.

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Rethinking Public Relations: Persuasion, Democracy and Society (3rd edition)

Reviewed by
Giselle A. Auger, Ph.D., APR, Rhode Island College

Rethinking Public Relations: Persuasion, Democracy and Society (3rd edition)
Authors: Kevin Maloney and Conor McGrath
New York, NY: Routledge, 2020
ISBN: 978-1-138-59365-7 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-48931-0 (ebk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-31300-5 (pbk)

The third edition of *Rethinking Public Relations: Persuasion, Democracy, and Society* continues its predecessors in evaluating the field of public relations in the context of its role and function in society. While the prior editions, namely, *Rethinking Public Relations: The Spin and the Substance* (2000) and *Rethinking Public Relations: PR Propaganda and Democracy* (2006) were authored by Kevin Maloney, this new edition welcomes Conor McGrath as co-author.

Also new for this edition is a chapter on digital and social media and improved content on corporate social responsibility (CSR), sponsorships, and community relations. Most importantly, the authors have analyzed not just the structural power of PR in society, but also the rhetorical power of PR. Beginning with the definition of public relations and idealization in Chapter 1, through the conclusion in Chapter 9, the authors argue that the role of PR in society should be advocacy and counter-advocacy rather than what they propose are the idealized roles of relationship building and reputation management.

Chapter 1 Paradoxes, Paradigms and Pillars

In this chapter, the authors discuss the inadequacies of definitions of PR from its stated or intended purpose as a company's conscience, to the way the industry presents itself as a management function that uses strategic communication to build and maintain relationships and reputation. Most importantly, they highlight the lack of 'persuasion' as a key aspect of PR in these definitions and conceptualizations.

The chapter argues that scholars must look beyond the four models of PR (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to examine PR's role and effect on the political economy, civil society and the media, an effect that is generated through propaganda, persuasion, and influence.

Chapter 2 PR: Dignified, Efficient, Self-delusional?

In the second chapter, the authors argue that PR has not clearly articulated its social purpose. They critically examine PR as strategic communication and also as a management function and then highlight inadequacies found when conceptualizing PR's role as relationship and reputation based. They suggest that PR should reclaim persuasion and influence as cornerstones of practice because these better reflect the realities of the industry. Finally, they review PR's historical links to propaganda and claim that PR is, in fact, weak propaganda because of its need to persuade audiences through argumentation and messaging.

Chapter 3 Rhetoric, Framing and PR Messaging

The third chapter builds on preceding chapters by focusing on persuasive messaging and its role in PR communication. They advance the notion that PR, through skillful messaging, can aid both the powerful and those in less advantageous positions in society. They suggest that because PR information is rarely neutral, instead designed to be persuasive, to influence public opinion and behavior, the status of PR should be elevated to that of other elite groups such as politicians, big business, and journalists, that transform society. As they note "All PR is fundamentally about advocacy, about advancing a particular agenda or interest" (Maloney & McGrath, 2020," Framing," para. 3).

The chapter provides several subsections, the first of which discusses a rhetorical perspective of PR. The authors suggest that PR must be considered as rhetoric as it will most always fall under public scrutiny in a marketplace of differing ideas and points-of-view and must be persuasive to make itself seen and heard. In this section, the authors make a point to warn that rhetoric can be dangerous when it is used to promote ideas that are not based on fact or truth. Additional subsections identify the use of framing and persuasive messaging as tools for developing strong persuasive content and the role of PR in a pluralistic liberal democracy.

Chapter 4 Stakeholders and Society

As indicated in its title, the fourth chapter discusses the use of 'publics' versus 'stakeholders' in public relations and whether and how the distinction matters. The authors explore the rise of the stakeholder concept from the management perspective of stakeholder theory, wherein stakeholders are considered as elements of risk that can positively or negatively affect an organization's ability to achieve its goals. They argue that in PR, stakeholders are generally perceived as allies and insufficient attention is applied to considering stakeholders as neutrals or opponents. To that end, the chapter discusses various ways in which stakeholders can be categorized for targeted PR communication, including ranking by legitimacy, urgency, and power, or by the power/interest matrix, which considers the extent to which stakeholders have power over the organization's ability to achieve its goals and the extent to which they are interested in the issue. The takeaway is that regardless of categorization, stakeholders are important to PR because they provide the recipient carefully constructed and targeted messaging.

Chapter 4 also discusses the roles of sponsorship, community relations, and corporate social responsibility as they relate to specialized groups of stakeholders and the pros, cons, and necessity for organizations to engage in these types of activities.

Chapter 5 Journalism and PR – Conflict, Complicity, Capitulation

The fifth chapter examines the relationship between journalism and public relations. It considers whether PR and journalism are sufficiently adversarial since journalists should critically and objectively evaluate PR communication, which is primarily one-sided advocacy and therefore likely lacking in objectivity. Such an 'adversarial' relationship is necessary for the retention of the third-party effect provided by the media and it is also needed to protect the public from the potentially negative effects of PR propaganda.

According to the authors, the 'PR-isation' and capitulation of the media to PR agendas has weakened the value of the third-party effect. As a result, people are less likely to trust the media, even when the stories are genuine and credible, and are less likely to absorb and be influenced by PR messaging. Thus, the authors suggest that journalism and PR should operate in two inter-connected but distinct communication systems. To do so, they argue PR must be re-conceptualized as a media system, much as journalism and advertising are conceptualized as media systems. Such systems have clear characteristics, which in the case of PR, would be to persuade for competitive advantage and self-interest, while conversely, journalism should be characterized by scrutiny of interest and objectivity.

Chapter 6 Digital Evolution or Revolution?

In this chapter, the authors consider the opportunities and pitfalls of communicating through digital and social media (DSM) in business and politics. Among the opportunities offered by DSM are the potential for groups and organizations of any size to disseminate messages globally and inexpensively, and to build virtual relationships with publics by communicating with them rather than at them. In a world where we are all content creators, positive consumer experiences, expressed through ratings, images, and commentary by publics can also aid in brand promotion and credibility. Conversely, negative commentary can harm reputation and credibility. Moreover, the practicality and expense of responding to all those who comment or engage with an organization through DSM are addressed as are the role of influencers, DSM's potential effect on crisis communication, and the positive and negative of DSM in political communication. Finally, the authors argue that the full potential of DSM is not being utilized by groups and organizations.

Chapter 7 PR, Politics and Democracy

This chapter critically examines the role of PR in politics and democracy. The authors argue that PR propaganda has always been a part of politics and as media becomes increasingly saturated with competing messages, there has been an increased need for PR to maximize electoral support. However, they caution that there is a danger that power may move from the politicians to those that present the messages (i.e., PR) and suggest a beneficial co-existence to aid democracy. The role of PR propaganda in this beneficial co-existence is to provide a plurality of voices and messages, presumably for organizations and groups of all sizes, in the marketplace of ideas thereby providing the plurality that is key to representative democracy.

Chapter 8 Lobbying and Public Affairs

The content of this chapter on lobbying, follows logically from Chapter 7, which focused on political communication. In this chapter, the authors examine the often controversial PR propaganda associated with lobbying. Yet, they point out that lobbying is a fairly cost-effective means for under-represented groups and for organizations of all sizes to insert a voice into societal debate. They suggest that lobbying is another form of rhetorical communication and that 'public affairs' is simply another term for lobbying.

They posit that PR's role is that of the 'voice' of policy pluralism. Further, that PR is conceptualized and planned internally but that it is executed externally on behalf of all manner of organizations from businesses to cause groups, to trade and industry associations, all of whom seek to influence policy decisions that will advance their own self-interests. They suggest that stakeholder theory and CSR have made PR more complex and more necessary as organizations strive to produce the most persuasive voice to promote or defend their interests in the competing marketplace of such interests.

As a result, there is a need for the advocacy and counter-advocacy provided by PR. Competing voices provide stakeholders with the opportunity to hear many persuasive messages and determine what they believe to be the truth.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the authors tie together their argument that the role of PR in society should be advocacy and counter-advocacy. While respectful of the traditional cornerstones of PR – mutual understanding, strategic communication, relationships and reputation management – the authors argue that PR is weak propaganda and its role is persuasive communication.

The sum of these chapters provides a thoughtful and critical evaluation of PR's function and role in society. The book is a good text for those interested in considering PR outside the status quo – who acknowledge and appreciate current models and theories but who are also willing to look at the role of PR from a different perspective.
The text meticulously cites and references major contributions to PR theory, providing summary information and critical evaluation of those contributions. Examples from both the United Kingdom and United States are woven into the text to provide examples of topics of discussion.

Overall, the book is appropriate as a supplementary text for undergraduate and graduate classes in PR, persuasion, public opinion, propaganda, business, or PR theory. It provides a unique voice in conceptualization of PR, taking readers outside the established paradigms and lending support to growing areas of PR research in advocacy and public interest communication.

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Everybody Writes: Your Go-To Guide to Creating Ridiculously Good Content

Reviewed by
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Everybody Writes: Your Go-To Guide to Creating Ridiculously Good Content
Author: Ann Handley
John Wiley & Sons, 2014
ISBN: 9781974051991
https://annhandley.com/

Background

Public Relations educators regularly look for books that stick to PR basics, acknowledge the evolving PR practice, and provide actionable advice for how to appeal to ever-decreasing attention spans. However, it is rare to find a book that meets all expectations and does so in a way that translates to the pre-professional's level of understanding. Public relations, at its core, values dynamic storytelling and the art of persuasion. Marketing also values those components, and with the digital space causing all forms of marketing and PR to collide, it is critical PR educators use a book that can acknowledge marketing principles and apply them to the PR world.

With the PR practice relying less on media relations, and more on content generation and brand journalism, it is critical students are taught how to recognize—and adapt to—an environment which requires thoughtful content strategy and creation. Teaching content strategy and creation best-practices will set the next generation of PR practitioners up for success.

With that in mind, most college-aged students are bombarded with online messages and have been since their adolescence. As such, how they communicate has been altered. As educators look for resources that meet the needs of today's modern student, it's important to find texts that combine fundamentals with new approaches. Everybody Writes does not stray away from teaching solid writing fundamentals, and acknowledges how to write factually, clearly, persuasively and in a digestible way for online audiences to accept.

In the book, the author, Ann Handley, prioritizes the importance of proper writing because brands' customers are telling stories for them. Long gone are the days where communications professionals are solely in charge of a brand's public perception. Online customers can tell their version of a company's story with one click. Because of this shared dynamic, she argues that compelling, strategic, and well-written content matters more now, not less, and that understanding content marketing is a necessity for all communications professionals.

Through each chapter, Handley provides students and educators tips for improving their writing skills, producing short and long-form content, and leveraging online tools to deliver the most reader-centered content.

As public relations educators look for a book that stays true to teaching writing fundamentals but acknowledges the current communications- dynamics shift, Handley's book should be considered a first choice.

How the Book Contributes to Public Relations Education

When considering the most essential skills a public relations student has to hone during his/her/their college career, most of us would list writing as the first and foremost skill. Handley points out that the idea writing is an ability or talent that is innately bestowed on us is untrue—yet, many educators assume each public relations student maintains some writing talent. This books helps educators to focus more on effective writing. What's most valuable for students to learn is how to master a writing style that borrows from both journalism and marketing. It is the most effective in the digital communications landscape, and a style can be taught.

Throughout each book section, Handley continuously expresses the idea that writers should use content as a means to give the audience an experience. Experiences are evoked from reading an insightful, informative, and easy-to-understand piece that provides the audience value. She acknowledges the business world often fails to focus on the art of storytelling and instead, relies on sales language riddled with puffery. Public relations writing often borrows from journalistic principles, as it should, but with the marketplace responding to massive amounts information spread on mobile devices, public relations educators and professionals have adapted their writing approaches with a focus on engagement, less on fact-driven news pieces. When reading the book, public relations educators can approach the lessons almost as a "choose your own adventure" with each section providing unique value.

How the Book is Organized

The book is divided into six sections: 1) Writing Rules to Write Better, 2) Writing Rules for Grammar and Usage, 3) Story Rules, 4) Publishing Rules, 5) Things Marketers Write, and 6) Content Tools.

The book's organization is thoughtful and allows public relations educators to skip around in areas that they deem necessary. One section does not necessarily impact others, so the book can be read out of order and assignments can be planned for, accordingly.

There are few sections that I found critical to the advancement of public relations education, mostly found in the Publishing Rules section.

Of specific noteworthiness is the section titled "Wait. What's Brand Journalism?" Brand journalism is an editorial approach to building a brand. In this section, Hadley makes the point that companies, organizations and major brands are now hiring those with journalistic training and talent to tell their stories across their owned and paid media channels. As we know, brand storytelling is essentially delivered by public relations practitioners, but with companies taking control of their brands through distributing high-quality content, the need for brand journalists is increasing. Here, educators have an opportunity to teach students how brand journalism impacts a PR campaign or vice versa.

Handley writes that brand journalism uses a brand's website as a publishing vehicle to: generate brand awareness, produce industry news, create sponsorship opportunities, and generate leads. PR educators have struggled to communicate how PR impacts a business directly, due to the historically inaccurate methods for reporting PR effectiveness. Handley offers a solution to this, however. The emphasis on lead generation in this section—which is usually reserved for marketers--is incredibly helpful for educators who are trying to teach students how strategic content converts to new business.

Secondly, in the Publishing Rules section, Handley provides helpful information about content moments and how influencers, thought leaders, and mainstream media look for multiple perspectives about a single topic. She explains to readers that content moments can be spurred from news—or more specifically, breaking news—and also from cultural trends and phenomena. In this pandemic and post-pandemic world ahead, where audiences are glued to screens, it is critical public relations professionals understand how to strategically create mobile-friendly content that engages all influential audiences. Through this book, and this section specifically, public relations educators are better equipped to explain how content marketing fits into the PR puzzle.

What Could Be Added to This Book to Improve it

While this book provides many valuable insights about the world of modern content creation, there are messages in the book that detract from fundamental PR practices. For example, in the section titled, "Post News That's Really News," Handley insinuates company news—or press releases--are better left in a website's media section for journalists, researchers, analysts or other interested parties. I would argue that company news worth sharing is part of an overall content strategy and that news and credibility boosting opportunities should be ingrained within any marketing effort. Company news should not be limited to a separate press room on a company page. As websites and other owned media channels fuel PR strategies, it is unproductive to view company news as separate from overall branding efforts. What Handley omits, unfortunately, is commenting on the direct connection between breaking company news and modern public relations practices. It will be up to the Public Relations educator to fill in the gaps when using this part of the text.

Who Will Benefit From This Book?

Handley strikes a balance that is often hard to achieve in most communications textbooks—she is humorous, informative, and provides concrete examples for educators to use as reference. Educators and students who are bombarded by messages and content stemming from PESO campaigns issued from brands, will need this book to identify high-quality messaging from amateur approaches.

Educators who are also looking for advice on which tools are available for promotion of—and distribution of—content will benefit from this book as well. At the end of the book, Handley dedicates a section to listing content tools. In it, she offers multiple websites, Chrome plug-ins and apps that appeal to the modern writer who is distributing content across many channels.

Handley walks the reader through the entire writing process—from ideation, to creation, to editing, to publishing all with audience-centered best practices at the fore.

Summary

In summary, Everybody Writes, breaks down challenges every communicator faces in a digital world and transforms the way we view writing. As educators are increasingly teaching technology-savvy Generation Z students, they will need a resource that stays true to the fundamentals of writing but acknowledges that the communications disciplines are merging. Writers will become stronger and more engaging through reading this book and educators will be better suited to teach students how to break out of humdrum content generation and catapult them into the exceptional.