Journal of Public Relations Education

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Volume 7, Issue 2, Summer 2021

AEJMC JPRE Public Relations Division

Journal of Public Relations Education

A publication of the Public Relations Division of AEJMC
ISSN 2573-1742

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Editorial Staff

Note from the Editor-in-Chief:
Within this issue, you'll find three articles which address various aspects of social and digital media within the curriculum. The timing is not the result of a special call for articles, and clearly represents an area of increased interest. I know I'll be sharing these within my own department as we continue to evaluate our own approaches.

Two articles are, in part, reflective of our times with greater attention to diversity as you'll see in Pompper & Ertem-Eray's article on "Reconstructing the PR history time machine," and of increased concern for our emotional and mental health, as addressed in Madden's and Del Rosso's, "We should have to take therapy classes." And for those with or considering student-run firms, you'll find the article on best practices helpful.

Of course, we have three of the top GIFTs selected and presented at AEJMC's Public Relations Division's ever-popular teaching panel which will provide creative approaches to how we can continue to develop student's understanding of and abilities to practice public relations.

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Editorial Review Board

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Public Relations Curriculum: A Systematic Examination of Curricular Offerings in Social Media, Digital Media, and Analytics in Accredited Programs

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ABSTRACT

As public relations (PR) students prepare for life in the professional world, the educational experiences inside of the college classroom should reflect transformations within the profession. To that end, this study included a systematic analysis of all domestic Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) accredited graduate and undergraduate PR programs to understand how social media, digital media, and analytics courses have been incorporated into PR program curricula. The data was collected over the summer months of 2019 and the fall semester of 2019. The results included 94 schools that offer PR as a major. This comprehensive study was meant to provide a thorough examination of the current state of curricular offerings related to emerging technologies.

Keywords: public relations curriculum, social media curriculum, analytics, digital media, public relations education

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted June 6, 2020. Revisions submitted October 30, 2020. Manuscript accepted for publication December 19, 2020. First published online September 2021.

As the lines between public relations (PR), advertising, and marketing continue to blur, further advances in data, analytics, digital media, and artificial intelligence (AI) lend an even greater influence on where the industry is heading. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and mediums like podcasts, have promoted new forms of participation for users by allowing them to generate messages as a creator and take collective actions, which relate to interactional empowerment (Shirky, 2011). To meet these industry demands, educators within higher education have developed digital and social media-related courses particularly for students majoring in PR (Ewing et al., 2018); however, the degree to which PR education is responding to shifts within digital spaces remains understudied.

This research, conducted over the summer months of 2019 and fall academic semester of 2019, carried out content analysis of all domestic Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) accredited graduate and undergraduate PR programs to understand how and where social media, digital media, and analytics courses have been incorporated into the PR curricula (Appendix A-C). Through manual coding, quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research provides a comprehensive look at the state of social and emerging media course offerings within accredited PR programs. Findings reveal gaps and opportunities that exist in social and emerging media education, and to what extent, the proliferation of these areas of study was being taught within the 21st Century PR curriculum in the United States. This research provides a snapshot of the classes offered and their course descriptions at ACEJMC and CEPR universities in the U.S during a specified time.

On the heels of the development of digital media tools including social media, educators seem to recognize the importance of adopting digital and social media. In Auxier's (2020) study of 39 educators, when asked how important teaching their students content related to social media and tools associated with social media, 77.5% of them responded "very important" or "important," with only 17.5% responded only 'slightly to moderately important.' Research has shown that teaching new media tools bring multiple benefits to students, including increased interactions with educators and peers, convenience of learning (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018), and developing their technical skills further (Larrondo Ureta & Peña Fernández, 2017), which can be useful in professional fields afterwards. They discovered that students who learned multimedia and social media tools developed not only teamwork or skills to interact with audiences but also technical skills including search engine optimization skills.

Despite these recent findings on the importance of teaching social media-related tools, the degree to which PR education is responding to these shifts within higher education remains unclear.

Review of the Literature: Evolution of Digital in Public Relations

Scholars offer some perspective on the importance of digital technology to PR over the course of the past decade, and how it relates to principles of best practice. Macnamara (2010) initially found support for the idea that practitioners were effectively exploiting social media for interactive, two-way communication by maintaining dialogic models of PR (Kent & Taylor, 2002), the Excellence Theory of PR (Grunig & Grunig, 1992), and Gini Dietrich's PESO model (2014). Further, Moreno et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between practitioners' personal and professional use of social media. Results show that practitioners with a high level of personal usage of social media give more importance to social media channels, influence of social media on internal and external stakeholders and relevance of key gatekeepers and stakeholders along with a better self-estimation of competencies.

Over the past decade, scholars examined this relationship through a variety of PR contexts, including corporate social responsibility (Cho et al., 2017), crisis communication (Romenti et al., 2014), nonprofit communication and fundraising (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015), government and political communication (DePaula & Dincelli, 2018), stakeholder dialogue (Elving & May Postma, 2017), cultivating credibility (Kim & Brown, 2015), relationship cultivation (Pang et al., 2018), strategic public identification and engagement (Watkins, 2017), and social presence (Men et al., 2018).

Sommerfeldt and Yang (2018) summarized the twenty-year body of study on digital communication in PR as "an indispensable part of public relations practice. It is clear from the state of research and practice in public relations that the question is no longer *if*, but *how* to best use digital communication technologies to build relationships with publics" (p. 60). The emphasis on social and digital media in terms of two-way communication is not new. A meta-analysis of the 20-year body of research on communication in social and digital media used in PR, of the 79 studies identified as relevant, 83% were concentrated on content analysis, 75% discussed practical applications, and only 25% presented theoretical implications (Wirtz & Zimbres, 2018). Examining big data on digital spaces has been found as a crucial strategy for researchers to explore dialogic communication, as Sommerfeldt and Yang (2018) identified the next opportunities for research in big data, where analytics have opened the door for new research opportunities in the discipline and to better understand the impact of this approach to social and digital media in PR.

However, the growth of social media use in practice has yet to be successfully integrated into the PR curriculum. Auger and Cho (2016) conducted a comprehensive analysis of PR curricula and concluded that the current PR course offerings were not only meeting industry needs, but also providing foundational knowledge in ethics, law, research, and globalization in course content. Unfortunately, educators fell short on social and new media, which students articulated.

The gap of integrating social and digital media into PR education is a critical need to be addressed, partly because of emerging challenges that social and digital media pose to communication practitioners. The long-standing problems of fake news (Nelson & Taneja, 2018), bots (Woolley & Howard, 2016), and racial tensions on social media with brands (Novak & Richmond, 2019) are all areas in which PR educators are needing to address in the classroom. In a digital media ecology, scholars and practitioners need to prevent the amplification of these problems in those being trained to enter the industry. This makes having students understand and address the issues using what they have learned from classes a stated priority in ACEJMC and CEPR standards. Therefore, it is important for educators to develop students' understanding of challenging issues in a digital media environment.

Current Status of Public Relations Curriculum

Scholars, educators, and practitioners set out to identify courses and competencies essential to graduates entering the modern workplace. According to the Commission on Public Relations Omnibus Survey findings (Commission on Public Relations Education [CPRE], 2018), educators reported that current required courses linked to technology were graphic design and social media, followed by courses that involve video production, digital media, and visual communication. Educators and practitioners both cited technology-based topics such as social media, analytics, web coding, and graphic design as important competencies for the workplace. Also noted was the importance of data literacy to modern practice for graduates. They need to not only know how to find available data but also to be able to pull out valuable information from it in order to make smarter decisions.

The integration of digital technology is evident in the entry-level positions. Brunner et al. (2018) found that writing remains a priority for employers, but a healthy emphasis on social media writing (47%) and blogs (27%) were present in the postings. Social media was a clear priority for employers, with a general mention of social media aptitude (32%), or references to specific platforms like Facebook (14%), Twitter (12%), LinkedIn (7%), YouTube (7%), Instagram (2%), and Pinterest (2%). The authors' findings suggest the importance of integrating social and digital media into production and writing courses in the PR curriculum. With some perspective on the growing emphasis on digital in PR work, the authors focus on a more effective definition for the digital PR curricula.

Research highlights the importance of teaching emerging communication platforms to students in PR degree programs, as technology does not 'stand still' (CPRE, 2018). Digital tools are changing the way we communicate and the way we understand current issues, so that the need for understanding technologies should be at the forefront in PR education. Duhé (2015) argues three pillars of PR education in the future: (a) fast-forward thinking, (b) interdisciplinary learning, and (c) analytical prowess. Of these, analytical prowess particularly refers to data gathering and analysis, which requires students to find, summarize and present information in an effective manner (Duhé, 2015). However, a disconnection between educators and practitioners in PR in terms of what should be developed further in the academic curriculum of PR programs persists.

In addressing the issue that faces PR education, Wright and Flynn (2017) provide two reasons behind the disconnection between PR practitioners and educators: PR programs are mostly subsets of other disciplines (e.g., journalism, mass communication, business, etc.), and interaction between educators and practitioners on curriculum development is rare. Such limitations in current PR programs relate to the lack of developing technology-based courses that connect PR curriculum to recent trends in technology. To follow the current trends of media, courses not related to technology should also include activities connecting technology trends (CPRE, 2018).

Previous Research Regarding Digital PR Curriculum

The literature illustrates that scholars are considering the impact of digital technology on the traditional teaching and learning of PR, as well as effective professional preparation of students in the classroom by consulting with industry professionals. Neill and Schauster (2015) made use of in-depth interviews with executives in advertising and PR agencies in the United States to identify the core competencies needed to have successful careers in the new media landscape. The findings indicated that while writing and presentation skills remain essential, employers identified math and data analysis commonly associated with social media listening and analytics as critical for new employees.

Indeed, digital technologies are now seen as the norm for PR practitioners, as supported by Wolf and Archer's (2018) research, which illustrates that the dialogic qualities of digital and social tools do not only support traditional PR capabilities but have become an essential part of it. Related, Fang et al. (2019) note that the continuing technological development of the advertising and PR (PR) industry and increasing transfer of marketing expenditures from traditional channels to emerging digital media have placed a heavy burden on advertising and PR education to train aspiring practitioners for strategic use of these technologies. Through a content analysis of 99 universities with advertising and PR programs, Fang et al. (2019) found that nearly a quarter of advertising and PR courses taught digital media, placing a greater emphasis on skills courses.

To specifically understand how educators were integrating social and digital media analytics into PR courses, Ewing et al. (2018) examined pedagogical practices documented on students' learning outcomes on course syllabi and Twitter chats between educators and industry professionals. Their findings suggest that developing concepts and skills, measuring results, contextualizing data, and learning how to use tools to engage in social listening were priorities in practice. Furthermore, some integration of industry-standard measurement platforms was needed. In 28% of the courses studied integrated social media platforms for course communication and activities as well as professional certifications programs.

Focusing more on social media education, other scholars interviewed 20 industry professionals to seek industry insights on the topics that should be covered in PR courses including social media, as well as what roles educators need to serve in these courses (Freberg & Kim, 2018). Industry professionals identified multi-platform content creation, marketing and PR principles, writing, analytics, and crisis communication. Importantly, the roles highlighted by industry professionals were liaisons between the academy and industry, experienced content builders, and role-models and mentors. Overall, these findings, which evaluated how social and digital media were reflected in PR-focused disciplines, altogether suggest that a gap between industry expectations and the academic courses should be mended.

In addition to examining professional skill-building, other scholars tested the effectiveness of social and digital media integration in PR classroom activities that reinforce theory and principles of practice. Fraustino et al. (2015) discovered that integrating case study discussions could create conditions for an experiential learning process, which allowed students to exchange theories and concepts with other peers. While another study was extended to examine teleworking and cross-institutional conditions (Madden et al., 2016).

However, integrating digital media presents challenges, although it is considered an essential adaptation in the teaching and learning of PR.

Novakovich et al. (2017) found that introducing professional social media skills into the curriculum provoked a significant amount of resistance on the part of learners. Students lack a sense of agency on social networks and required guidance when articulating modes of online authenticity. The scholars also found an alarming gap between students' everyday practices on social networks and professional practice. Research documents that other factors should be considered such as perceived usefulness, ease of use in platforms, or desirability to use platforms, to encourage students for their continued use of digital media for learning (Dalvi-Esfahani et al., 2020). With a discussion of studies exploring the digital PR curricula, in general, the focus shifts to digital PR as a required course in the curriculum.

Social Media, Digital Media, and Analytics as a Required Course in PR Curriculum

Grounded by the uses and gratifications theory (Katz & Blumler, 1974), college students frequently use digital and social media for diverse purposes, including interacting with friends or family or entertainment (Ezumah, 2013). Although students today are considered 'digital natives,' those born after the 1980s and exposed to these digital technologies at a very early stage of their lives (Prensky, 2001), more courses about digital media should be developed, as self-assessed digital skill does not always indicate that students have much expertise in digital media used in the professional world (Kumar et al., 2019). For example, a multigroup analysis demonstrated a clear pattern of differences in effect exists between digital natives and digital immigrants (individuals born before the 1980s), or before the existence of digital technology (Prensky, 2001) with respect to the sequential belief updating mechanism with regard to adoption and use of digital tools (Kesharwani, 2020). While the results are relatively stable over time, digital natives desire instructor guidance to build their familiarity with new technology. This improved pedagogy would further enhance their compatibility with the system being used by PR practitioners, as frequently, digital media are used for getting to know audiences and building relationships in a community through social media encourage meaningful and critical discussions (Moody, 2010). By learning how to use social media effectively, students can become active participants in conversations (Quinn-Allan, 2010). Students can understand the role of digital media platforms in connecting a community, and how they can use the medium to facilitate conversations with audiences, which are essential skills of communication professionals.

Additionally, incorporating social media into PR programs can enhance students' abilities to produce and share information efficiently (Locker & Kienzler, 2013), which is related to *data literacy* or "knowing how to identify, collect, organize, analyze, summarize, and prioritize data," and "how to develop hypotheses, identify problems, interpret the data, and determine, plan, implement, and monitor courses of action" (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013, p. 30). Given its importance, Ridsdale et al. (2015) offer several tips for data literacy education, including teaching the benefits of using data, relating workshops with practical experiences, module- and project-based learning that has real-world applicability, and using real-world data that can spur students' interests. Relating digital PR courses to the real-world can make students prepare to be a communication expert. This educational approach should go beyond allowing students to become familiar with using technologies.

On the basis of the stated literature, the researchers posed the following research questions:

RQ1: Where are social media, digital media, and analytics taught in accredited PR programs?

RQ2: How are social media, digital media, and analytics being taught in accredited PR programs?

Methodology

The research team used a systematic approach to investigate where in the PR curricula social media, analytics, and digital media courses were being incorporated into undergraduate and graduate programs across domestically located ACEJMC and CEPR accredited schools (Appendix A). This research was not meant to compare courses offered at ACEJMC accredited universities to those offered at CEPR accredited schools; rather, it provides a descriptive compilation of curricular offerings. Using predetermined categories, the research team collected data from fully accredited ACEJMC and fully accredited CEPR universities. A comparable approach to the quantitative research that Langan et al. (2019) conducted was applied wherein they investigated AACSB accredited programs within marketing curricula to understand how digital marketing courses were incorporated into domestic marketing programs.

The entirety of the data collected represents programs that offer either bachelor's or graduate degrees in PR, advertising, strategic communication, integrated marketing communication (IMC) and journalism. Of the institutions contributing to the dataset, a subset (n=94) of accredited institutions was examined; of which 74 held ACEJMC accreditation (Appendix B), 69 CEPR accreditation (Appendix C), and 52 holding both ACEJMC/CEPR accreditations (Appendix A). Figure 1 highlights this breakdown of program accreditations.

Additionally, of the 94 institutions of interest, each school was more closely examined for degree availability, with programs offering both a bachelor's and graduate degree in PR being of most interest. Figure 2 highlights eight ACEJMC, 12 CEPR, and a combined 27 ACEJMC/CEPR accredited programs offering a bachelor's degree in PR, while Figure 3 indicates that there are four ACEJMC, two CEPR, and a combined 17 ACEJMC/CEPR accredited programs offering graduate PR programs.

Figure 1

Number of ACEJMC and CEPR Accredited Schools Total

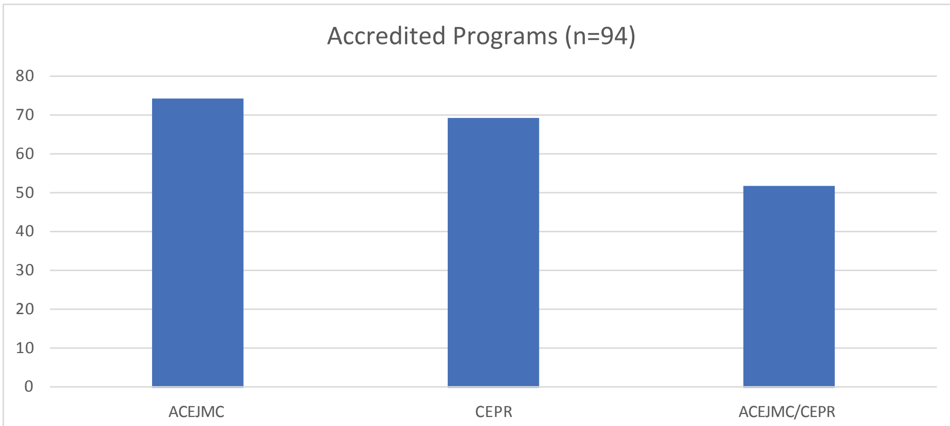
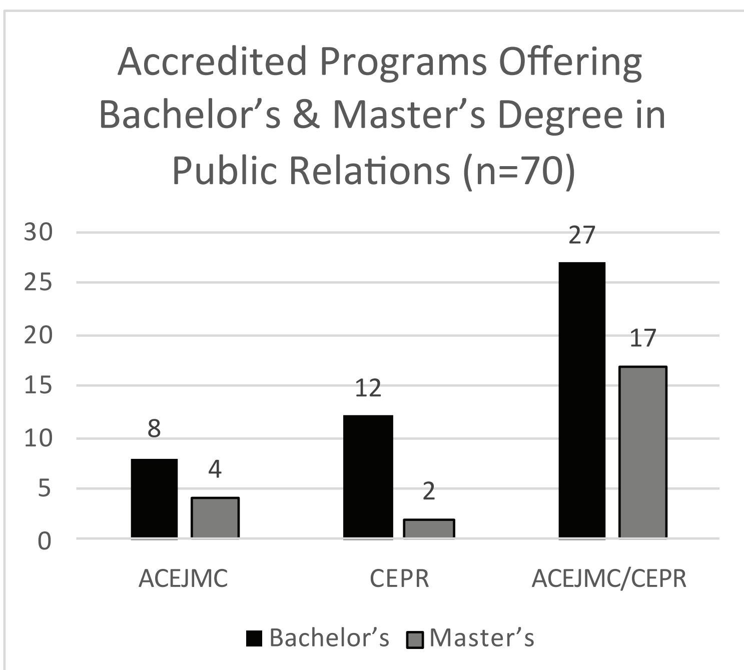


Figure 2

Accredited Programs Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Public Relations



Data Collection Procedure and Compilation

Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used to gather data to address the research questions. During the summer and fall of 2019, members of the research team collected and compiled data from 94 accredited colleges and universities. To ensure the accuracy of the data, specific research criteria were defined, guiding researchers with identifying the desired inputs for the broader dataset. The authors created a subset of the master list of relevant institutions and divided the list equally among members of the research team for the initial data collection, with each subset of data then undergoing a cross-validation from a different researcher for further validation.

Due to the inherent variability of the data of interest between institutions, intercoder reliability is important to ensure interpretation of latent content is consistent between coders. Common discrepancies between researchers and datasets tended to relate to the course naming conventions used by institutions and the associated coding, prompting additional discussions and exploration to determine if the course did, in fact, meet the defined research criteria. As the discrepancies were resolved, a refined search and documentation procedure was developed, allowing the larger list of remaining institutions of interest to be divided among researchers and investigated as part of the final dataset.

Table 1

Available Areas of Specialization Within Accredited Public Relations Programs of Study

Accredited Institutions	Minor in Digital/ Social	Concentration in Digital/Social	Certification in Digital/ Social	Track in Digital/ Social	Total
ACEJMC	4	2	7	5	18
CEPR	4	0	2	4	10
ACEJMC/CEPR	8	8	15	1	32
Total	16	10	24	10	60

To examine data, a thorough content analysis of course descriptions was conducted, which is discussed in detail below.

Data Criterion

Leveraging a thorough review of the literature, the researchers understand how social media, digital media, and analytics have been incorporated into current PR curricula, which informs our data collection and analysis. The research team visited university and college websites pulling information from course catalogs to collect data based on the following variables:

Public Relations Major: We define PR major as any institution that offers a bachelor's or graduate degree in PR and that follows the accreditation standards for either ACEJMC or CEPR guidelines.

Required Courses: We recorded the names, course numbers, and descriptions of courses dedicated to curricula on social media, analytics, or digital media as requirements to graduate with a PR degree.

Elective Courses: The researchers recorded the names, course numbers, and descriptions of courses on social media, analytics, or digital media as electives offered within PR programs.

Tracks: The researchers recorded the number of institutions that offer a track in social media, analytics, and digital media.

Certificates: The researchers recorded the number of institutions that offer a university accredited certification specializing in social media, analytics, and digital media. Certifications offered through third party organizations such as Hootsuite or Google were not included in this analysis.

Social media courses: The researchers adopted a broad definition of social media as our criterion when analyzing course content as there are multiple definitions available (McIntyre, 2014; Otieno & Matoke, 2014). To that end, social media "are web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible" (McCay-Peet & Quan- Haase, 2017, p. 17). Based on this definition, social media in our analyses includes diverse platforms that feature two-way interactions, such as YouTube, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Digital media courses: Courses that provide an infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content via digital channels were defined as digital media (Howard & Parks, 2012).

Content Analysis Method

Using the course descriptions collected, the research team performed content analysis (Berelson, 1952) of the presence of key curricular areas present in the available course descriptions (N=154) to assess what content is delivered as well as how the content is delivered. The researchers adopted content analysis because it offers an objective, systematic manifestation of the content of communication, enabling the research team to explore what is actively present in the courses analyzed within accredited PR programs by facilitating a rich, complex body of data. Krippendorf (1980) maintains that content analysis offers technical sophistication and scientific rigor.

Findings

Based on content analysis, data collected from the aforementioned 94 institutions of interest, having obtained either ACEJMC, CEPR, or both accreditations for their undergraduate and graduate PR programs, a closer examination was completed to understand how social media, analytics, and digital media courses have been incorporated into the PR program curricula. Of the 94 identified schools, 50% (n = 47) offer a bachelor's degree, 24.5% (n = 23) offer a graduate degree and 17% (n = 16) offer a minor in PR. Of these institutions, we found that only 30 programs (31.9%) require students to take a course specifically related to social media, digital media, or analytics to fulfill either their undergraduate or graduate degree requirements. The remaining 68.1% (n = 64) of institutions did not require a social media, digital media, or analytics course within their PR curricula. Further, 15 of the identified institutions (15.9%) provided an option for students to take at least one social media, digital media, or analytics course as an elective within the curriculum. Of these same schools offering electives, only one program (6%) required a course within these domains, as well as offered an additional elective(s). Stated differently, only about one in three institutions possessing either ACEJMC, CEPR, or both accreditations require a social/digital media or analytics course within their core PR curriculum.

We recognize that programs offering undergraduate, graduate or minors in PR may also provide additional course offerings that are available to students with an interest beyond PR. This study specifically examined PR curricula. As noted earlier, at these 94 institutions of interest, social media, digital media, and analytics may also be available as either a certificate, track, or concentration.

Course Description Analysis

The content analysis of the 154 course descriptions found on university websites through their respective course catalogs demonstrates some intuitive understanding of the progression of the discipline to an integration of strategic communication sub-discipline, and the necessity for integration of technical and strategic aptitude with social media and digital media within the context of theory and principles of best practice. Figure 3 demonstrates a word cloud which is a visual representation of keyword frequency and relevance based on text data (Appendix D) from the course descriptions (Dubinko et al., 2006). The larger and bolder the word appears, the more often it is mentioned within a given text and the more important it is.

Figure 3

Word Cloud Containing Course Titles of the ACEJMC and CEPR Accredited Schools Examine

Implied Presence of Public Relations Models

In reviewing the content in the course descriptions, the integration of core principles of best practice associated with PR models and social media, digital media, and data analytics emerged. Research to maximize the impact of emerging technology saw 20 total references across the body of course descriptions. The strongest concentration of discussion centered around the strategic application of primary and secondary research aimed at understanding targeted digital audiences, as well as the problems and needs of clients, with 12 references across the course descriptions. While research saw a strong presence in the course descriptions, goal and objective setting for social media and digital media was largely absent from the conversation. Terms such as social media, viral campaign, and spreadable media strategy was mentioned 13 times among the course descriptions. Evaluation using data measurement and analysis had a healthy presence in the course description, though not as strong as others in the group associated with PR campaign modeling. As a larger grouping, evaluation was discussed 19 times. Looking at the focus of discussion of evaluation within the course descriptions, 15 focused on the relationship between evaluation and assessment and determining campaign outcomes.

Technician Work Over Managerial Mindset within Digital Media

In reviewing the course descriptions there is heavy emphasis on technical work, with minimal discussion of managerial focus across the social media courses available at accredited programs. An anticipated result is the abundant presence of a myriad social and digital media production skill set references (73) in course descriptions. Included among these references are content creation for social media and multimedia platforms (12), Web design (10), social media practice (9), graphic design (8), digital storytelling (7), search engine optimization including Google certification (5), mobile application design (5), music and audio engineering (5), video production (4), still photography (3), mobile communication (2), online interactive advertisement production (1), computing coding (1), and the use of drones for recording purposes (1). In addition to social media production skills, the researchers found a strong emphasis on writing within the social media course descriptions. Writing for media, news writing, and PR writing were referenced in 10 instances in the course descriptions. Specifically, relevant to strategic social media, audience engagement and interactivity is mentioned in 10 course descriptions. Associated with engagement and interactivity, audience or consumer behavior is discussed in three course descriptions, and user experience is mentioned in two course descriptions. There is clearly an emphasis on skill-building to accommodate one-stop shop work in social and emerging media.

Contemporary and Traditional Conduits for Strategic Communication

There is a strong presence of social and digital media platforms among the course descriptions analyzed. Social media platforms are mentioned in 26 different course descriptions, whether by specific platform or in general. Strategic use of blogs is referenced in three specific course descriptions. Podcasting is referenced in two total courses, and really simple syndication (RSS) feeds are referenced in two course descriptions. AI and virtual reality, emerging platforms in PR and affiliated strategic communication sub fields, are referenced in one course description.

Strategic application of social and digital media platforms is present in 25 total courses. Discussion of strategic use of digital media, social media, new media, transmedia, and multimedia tactics are referenced in 10 total courses. Results revealed that the PESO model (Dietrich, 2014) is becoming a standard element within courses on social and digital media, reflecting its growth as a core component of PR industry practice. Macro-strategic applications of integrated, converged, and multimedia are mentioned in eight total courses. Consideration of the impact of emergent technologies in the discipline are present in 10 total course descriptions. The impact of emerging technology on strategic campaign design and development are present in five total courses. Additionally, the philosophical discussion of technological evolution, dynamism, and innovation is present in five total courses.

Data Analytics, Interpretation, and Visualization

Among the more dominant concepts in the analysis is an emphasis on the value of data analytics, data analysis, leveraging findings to maximum strategic effect, and articulating those findings in a meaningful way to strategic publics, clients, and organizational leadership. Analysis and interpretation are the strongest areas of emphasis, referenced in 32 total course descriptions. Specific concepts of discussion include analysis of data analytics in 16 courses, measurement and analysis of social media in 13 courses, data manipulation and interpretation in two courses, and keyword competitive analysis in one course.

The relationship between analytics and big data was discussed across 25 courses. In addition to the discussion of data analytics in 14 courses mentioned above, specific emphasis on social media analytics is present in 10 courses. Data insights, visualization, and presentation were also present in the review of course descriptions in 23 courses. Data visualization is present in 10 courses; data presentation is present in six courses; social listening, data insights, and Return on Investment are mentioned in one course apiece.

Certificates, Tracks or Concentrations

At the 94 educational institutions examined, social media, analytics, or digital media may also be available as either a university awarded certificate, track, or concentration. The analysis indicates that most schools with PR programs offer certificates (n = 24, 25.5%), concentrations (n = 10, 10.6%), or tracks (n = 13, 13.8%) in social media, analytics, or digital media.

Sociocultural and Professional Impact

Within the analysis of course descriptions, there is a strong presence of the intersection of media, culture, and society. Sociocultural considerations of the impact of emerging social and digital technologies are present in 24 course descriptions. Discussion about various forms of impact on social contexts are discussed in 17 course descriptions. Discussion of intercultural and global influence on strategic social media campaigns are present in three course descriptions.

Discussion of the sociological dimensions of online culture, network communication, online shaming, and the impact of social and digital media on celebrity culture are present in one course description each.

The impact of social media on the news industry, news consumption, and public information is a point of emphasis in 25 course descriptions. Discussion of the democratization of media content creation and co-created content is present in three course descriptions. A discussion of citizens' diverse media diet and media consumption practices are present in four courses. Finally, the emergence of fake news and disinformation on social media has also begun to emerge in the social media curriculum, as three courses reference discussion and exploration of information credibility and defining truth.

Discussion about the impact and influence of technology and media are present in 25 course descriptions. Media effects research and discussion of the consequences associated with social media use are present in nine course descriptions. The impact of technology on the PR profession is present in eight course descriptions. Finally, the economic and financial impact of social media and emerging technology are discussed in eight course descriptions. Affiliated with the discussion of the influence of technology is a discussion of media history and past impact of emerging technology on society and communication practices, which is present in six course descriptions.

Discussion

The overarching goal for the study was to examine and understand where and how social media, digital media, and analytics were being taught in accredited PR programs as well as how these areas were being taught in accredited PR programs, given the growing importance of these fields to employers. The quantitative and qualitative analysis provides some encouraging details about the philosophical focus and emphasis of curriculum development associated with emerging technology and practices. There is a clear alignment of social and digital media courses to traditional models of best practice in strategic PR. That said, the current presence of only 30 programs among the 94 accredited degree programs examined demonstrates that while social and emerging media are present, improvement is essential to satisfy the need expressed by employers in the discipline. Our findings are aligned with the latest report out of the Institute for Public Relations. Their October 2020 Career Path of a Social Media Professional reported that of the 400 respondents, 80% had not taken a course in social media because none was offered at their university (DiStaso & McCordindale, 2020). Our research highlights that social and emerging media are woven throughout curricula; however, universities must be more proactive in developing specific courses, as well as considering complete majors or minors in these areas.

The emphasis on research, strategy and tactics, and evaluation in particular demonstrates a commitment, albeit incomplete, to going beyond technical training in the technology to helping aspiring professionals see how to integrate emerging technology into professional practice.

While limited in emphasis, it is clear that objective setting is also present in the current instruction on applying emerging technologies to the discipline. These findings certainly align with Sommerfeldt and Yang's (2018) call for the discipline to go beyond looking at whether social and digital media are used in PR to an exploration of how it is applied strategically.

The authors are encouraged by the emphasis on establishing the value of quality writing within social and digital media used in strategic settings among the growing body of course offerings and programs available. This is in keeping with past literature that reinforces employers' value of quality writing among aspiring professionals (Neill & Schauster, 2015), but the data also illustrates a concerted effort by educators to address the needs established by prospective employers in past literature.

Also encouraging is the emphasis on exploring the impact of these new technologies and practices on existing models of practice, sociocultural norms, and political communication practice and engagement. Further, a clear discussion of the impact of these emerging media on public opinion, behavior, and how we interact in society are present in the course descriptions provided. An area of potential expansion may be putting further emphasis on the legal and ethical considerations and implications in the curriculum. While the authors acknowledge that these may be present in standing ethics and law courses, the latest Commission on Public Relations Education report (2018) calls for integration of ethical discussion in a central course as well as within individual courses.

The authors also note the prevalence of emerging trends within the course descriptions that align with existing literature on the need for knowledge of data literacy and management (Ridsdale et al., 2015). Clearly, educators are putting emerging technology and applications at the forefront of their courses, which will require consistent examination and updates for the perpetual evolution of practices and integration into instruction. There is also a heavy emphasis on big data, analytics, interpretation of data, and data visualization. It is clear in the course descriptions that educators are making a clear effort to articulate the value of these new elements to strategic practices within the existing models of best practice. It is also clear that this emphasis will require effort on the part of educators to help instruct aspiring professionals on the importance of effective data management and processing for analysis, which does get some limited attention in the course descriptions. A better articulation of data management and analysis will better align with existing literature emphasizing the importance of data literacy (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013).

An element of concern is the balance of focus on emerging trends and practices being articulated purely from a technician's role in the course descriptions. While the authors acknowledge that it is important for aspiring professionals to understand how to use technology and tools professionally (Kumar & Nanda, 2020), there needs to be an effort to ensure that aspiring professionals sustain a manager's mindset and role when integrating these emerging tools and technologies in practice (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). While the authors acknowledge that it may be present in other areas of the curriculum, there is an incomplete articulation of a managerial perspective in the courses offered, or the descriptions.

Further, an area of growth and consideration for schools of communication would be to move beyond certificates, tracks, and concentrations. There is an opportunity for programs to create social media or emerging media majors, particularly within undergraduate curriculum. As the literature review revealed, the profession needs students who are astute in emerging media technologies (Fang et al., 2019; Brunner et al., 2018; Elving & May Postma, 2017).

Limitations/Delimitations

The authors note that there are certainly limitations within the qualitative aspects of this study worth acknowledging. One limitation is that we are only examining accredited PR programs of study, leaving the larger body of communication, mass communication, and their subfields yet to explore. This clearly merits a broader examination of the body of social media, data analytics, and digital media courses available across the discipline. The potential integration of this curriculum in advertising, integrated strategic communication, digital journalism, or communication with PR coursework is not lost on the researchers, and merits extension of this study to explore the other avenues identified. The authors also question that while the curriculum is integrated in disciplinary and technological focus, why key themes associated with disciplinary or technological integration are not coming through more consistently in the course descriptions at the class level.

This study focuses on the course descriptions available, which may not always reflect the depth of content offered in a course. To overcome this limitation, future analysis should strive to examine course syllabi to get a more specific picture of the depth and focus of content beyond the themes articulated in course descriptions.

Future Research

Thinking beyond limitations, the authors also note some clear areas of examination that represent the next steps for study to develop a richer body of understanding about teaching and learning in PR education. Speaking to the discipline's ability to meet the needs of the industry (Brunner et al., 2018), the authors note that further examination of current practices within the industry to better identify what areas of need further emphasis, addition, or revision in the content to better reflect needs. Integrating the perspective of employers, industry veterans, and entry-level professionals on essential skills, principles of best practice, and philosophical and ethical considerations will better help educators to develop, offer, and assess graduates' proficiency in knowledge of skills, principles of practice, and theory that best meet the needs of the discipline and allow us to answer the call for better industry integration in the classroom (Krishna et al., 2020).

The authors also acknowledge the need for additional research on the integration of PR principles and managerial perspectives in PR in social and emerging media courses. The authors note that these elements are likely present in other courses throughout the curriculum. That said, the authors note the value of integrating managerial perspectives and principles of best practices to facilitate scaffolding of concepts in social and emerging media courses that ultimately facilitate stronger integration of practice in upper level and capstone courses of study.

The benefits of increased research surrounding PR curriculum are multitiered: to enhance the way students are learning; to augment traditional methods of teaching; and to advance the use of social media, analytics, and digital media technology beyond personal use to make connections to the classroom and the profession. Furthermore, as a greater number of universities adopt curriculums that incorporate these areas of study, the needs of Generation Z as learners will be more closely met. It is important to continue research within this field, particularly as it relates to educating students who are entering the PR and communications field because, as educators, we want the next generation of PR professionals to be better trained when they enter today's technology driven workforce.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this research provides an initial picture of the current programs and courses related to social media, digital media, and analytics available among accredited PR programs. It is evident, based on the findings, that these areas of study represent a core component to ACEJMC and CEPR accredited universities. That educators are working to meet the needs of the industry through skills and research-based course offerings are unmistakable. We believe over the next few years that more universities will require additional courses in these areas, as well as, data, machine learning, natural language processing, network analysis, and AI, to ensure graduates are prepared to work in a social media and data driven environment. The important conclusions found within this research introduce new data highlighting a multitude of relevant benefits to incorporating emerging media within a PR curriculum.

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Appendix A

Schools both ACEJMC and CEPR accredited during study duration (2019)

ACEJMC + CEPR (2019)	
American University	St. Cloud State University
Ball State University	SUNY Buffalo State
Bowling Green State University	Syracuse University
Central Michigan University	Temple University
Drake University	Texas State University
Eastern Illinois University	University of Georgia
Elon University	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Hofstra University	University of Iowa
Indiana University	University of Kansas
Iona College	University of Kentucky
Kansas State University	University of Memphis
Louisiana State University	University of Minnesota
Loyola University New Orleans	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Marshall University	University of Nevada, Reno
Michigan State University	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Middle Tennessee State	University of North Texas
Murray State University	University of Oklahoma
Nicholls State University	University of Oregon
Ohio University	University of Southern Mississippi
Pennsylvania State University	University of Tennessee
Savannah State University	University of Tennessee at Martin
Shippensburg University	University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire
South Dakota State University	Washington and Lee University
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale*	West Virginia University
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville	Western Kentucky University

*on a 1-year delay ACEJMC COVID

Appendix B

Schools ACEJMC accredited during study duration (2019)

ACEJMC Only (2019)
Arizona State University
Arkansas State University
California State University, Chico
California State University, Fullerton
California State University, Northridge
City University of New York
Colorado State University
Florida International University
Howard University
Jacksonville State
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University
San Jose State University
St. Bonaventure University
University of Alabama
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
University of Idaho
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri
University of Montana
University of New Mexico
University of North Alabama
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg
University of Southern California

Appendix C

Schools CEPR accredited during study duration (2019)

CEPR Only (2019)
Eastern Kentucky University
Ferris State University
Lee University
Monmouth University - New Jersey
Ohio Northern University
Quinnipiac University
Radford University - Virginia
Union University
University of Central Missouri
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado, Boulder
University of Florida
Valdosta State University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)
Wayne State University

Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 44-76

Analytics in PR Education: Desired Skills for Digital Communicators

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examined the analytics knowledge and skills agencies seek in new digital public relations hires and extends recent research on the topic of strategic communication analytics education. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 senior managers at O'Dwyer's 2019 Top Independent Agencies. These professionals identified the analytic training and tool knowledge most desired in new hires. Results show that basic education in analytic measurement and data analysis is necessary preparation for the digital job market and that communication managers seek new hires with strong critical thinking skills with the ability to gain insights from multiple data sources. Effective communication of analytic insights and awareness of their implications for the organization or business were also noted as highly-desirable skills.

Keywords: public relations, social media, analytics, evaluation

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted November 11, 2020. Manuscript accepted for publication December 16, 2020. First published online September 2021.

Public relations, as both practice and discipline, has been described as being in a state of reinvention due to the availability of digital data metrics and the rise of social media communication as strategic organizational communication (Daniels, 2018; DiStaso & Bortree, 2014). Consequently, public relations practitioners and researchers have discussed the need to include social media metrics and analytics education as part of public relations programs, to examine how it is being incorporated into classes, and to develop learning goals and pedagogy to support the process (Anderson & Swenson, 2013; Kent et al., 2011; Stansberry, 2016; Wiesenberg et al., 2017). Researchers recently proposed a concise list of learning outcomes for undergraduate courses (Ewing et al., 2018).

The dashboard reporting model adopted by marketers and advertisers is now the expected norm in public relations practice as is the use of common evaluation language of digital measurement (click-throughs, conversions, etc.) However, effectively communicating analytic insights using industry language is often a struggle for both practitioners and academics due to the unfamiliar terminology (Sanchis, 2019) and the fact that this technology is relatively new and constantly evolving (unlike traditional research methods). The advent of new digital measurement guidelines such as Barcelona 2.0 has also contributed to the urgency of the need for public relations curriculum to evolve and include analytics training as part of the new standard (Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications [AMEC], 2015; Commission on Public Relations Education [CPRE], 2018).

Therefore, public relations educators are challenged with the development of analytic skills and digital measurement knowledge in order to incorporate training into existing curricula. This scramble to "skill up" to meet the needs of students and demands of the job market means that there has been a great focus on attaining certifications, but little research has been done to determine if this training aligns with the actual needs and expectations of the profession. Although recent research has noted that the skill set of public relations instructors should be updated to address digital media skills and measurement, there are differences in opinion between academics and professionals on how and what should be learned to bridge this gap (Shen & Toth, 2013). In addition, because digital public relations evaluation includes multiple social media and content metrics, experience using basic analytics tools and social media research methods to develop holistic performance insights would provide students valuable training in critical thinking, and would help them understand how such measures contribute to better understanding organizational publics (Kent, et al., 2011; Stansberry, 2016; Waddington, 2017).

More recently, public relations educators have called for an integration of analytics training at the programmatic and course levels to address this need. Analytics education should be incorporated into existing curriculum such as public relations campaigns capstones and not just taught as stand-alone courses or as part of social media courses only (Adams et al., 2019). Just as social media practice is now deeply integrated into public relations practice, analytic thinking and analysis are increasingly important and therefore, this training should be included in core courses as well as social media management courses (Adams et al., 2020).

Considering the challenges of keeping up with the technology and the differing opinions on digital measurement training within academia, this exploratory study was designed to identify the analytics knowledge and skills that public relations agency managers expect and value most among new hires. The study also extends recent research (Ewing et al., 2018) that recommended analytics learning outcomes by comparing those outcomes to practitioner expectations in the current job market.

Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following research questions: What analytic skills and training are agency professionals seeking in new hires? What specific social media listening and analytics tools and certifications are most valued by agency managers? And, what emergent skills or training are becoming necessary in digital analytics?

Literature Review

Public Relations Measurement and Reinvention

A number of evaluation frameworks have been promoted for public relations in the years preceding digital practice, including those that incorporated media effects metrics (awareness and intent for example), business measures such as "ROI" (return on investment), and the tabulation of various outputs (including AVEs or Advertising Value Equivalencies) (AMEC, 2016; Lindenmann, 2005; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Watson, 2012). So many measures and evaluative frameworks have been proposed in public relations scholarship that Lindenmann argued that there were ample measures available for use—the issue was instead for practitioners to do a better job of getting management to recognize and support public relations efforts (Lindenmann, 2005). However, as social media and "new media" became part of professional practice, practitioners were challenged with how best to measure and report their effectiveness, and academics have struggled to keep up with evolving digital communication platforms, terminology, and best practices (DiStaso & Bortree, 2014; Freberg & Kim, 2018; Sanchis, 2019; Zhang & Freberg, 2018).

In her overview of new media research in public relations, Sandra Duhé (2015) identified the theoretical applications and extensions that have been explored in academic research since the dawn of digital public relations practice. Theoretical contributions to crisis communication, two-way communication, and ethics have been published in public relations journals in numerous studies. However, Duhé's exhaustive survey does not mention how digital public relations measurement has been studied or how these new measures have influenced recent research or theory-building.

This is not an oversight; instead, this omission simply points to the need to reconceptualize public relations measurement as an integrated element in digital media—measurement that is immediate, continuous, and easily accessible.

Social media has forced academics as well as practitioners to rethink PR as a digital practice requiring new conceptualizations of public-organization communication (Daniels, 2018; DiStaso & Bortree, 2014; Stansberry & Strauss, 2015) and research and evaluation (Daniels, 2018; Kent, 2001; Macnamara, 2014a, 2014b, 2018; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018).

The last decade has brought a host of new measurement frameworks, tools, and standards to support the evaluation of digital public relations campaigns. Perhaps most significantly is AMEC's (International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communications) announcement of the Barcelona Principles in 2010. The result of an international collaboration, the seven principles address the affordances and challenges of social media communication and refocused evaluation on outcomes rather than simple outputs (AMEC, 2010). The principles note that social media efforts should be measured, and AVEs (Advertising Value Equivalencies) should be abandoned as they are not public relations (AMEC, 2010).

Following the announcement of the Barcelona Principles, scholarship on the history of public relations measurement traced the progression of traditional measures (outputs such as counting media impressions) to the incorporation of business measures in the 1990s (such as KPIs or key performance indicators) and their integration into the more holistic, outcomes-focused, digital evaluation framework (Macnamara, 2014a; Watson, 2012). One problem noted was the fact that social media platforms and the tools designed to manage and measure social communications all used different types of measures (Marklein & Paine, 2012). This issue was acknowledged in discussions of valid metrics for social media during the 2012 Social Media Conclave and the development of social media standards for measurement proposed by the Digital Analytics Association in 2013 (Macnamera, 2014b). New evaluation models also included the holistic perspective afforded by the Barcelona Principles to include outcomes as well as outputs and consider qualitative measures and methods such as social listening (Macnamara, 2014a, Macnamera & Gregory, 2018).

Due to the rapid evolution of digital media platforms and the adoption of social media in professional communication, the Barcelona Principles were expanded in 2015 to focus more on "what to do" rather than "what not to do," according to David Rockland of Ketchum and AMEC working group member (Rockland, 2015). He explains Barcelona 2.0 as more holistic overall to account for all of professional communication (not just public relations) and to include qualitative methods in recognition of the need to understand context and color in social media conversations (Rockland, 2015). "Barcelona 2.0" retained the original emphasis on impacts and outcomes of communication campaigns and recognized the further integration of public relations, advertising, and marketing functions within organizations (AMEC, 2015; USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2017).

The processes of reinventing public relations evaluation are still in evolution (Schriner et al., 2017). This study of Silver Anvil Award winners discovered that many of the campaigns still placed less emphasis on outcomes and more on outputs and some still included AVEs as a measure. The authors argued for the further incorporation of more holistic and robust measures, especially regarding social media evaluation that should account for online conversations and community engagement (AMEC, 2015; Schriner et al., 2017).

Digital Public Relations Education

Considering this evolution of the profession, the need for new best practices and the demand to measure efficacy, digital public relations education research has understandably focused on teaching social media tool knowledge, professional certifications (Freberg & Kim, 2018; Kinsky, et al., 2016; Stansberry & Strauss, 2015), and the expansion of professional ethics to address the realities of digital communication (Bowen, 2013; DiStaso & Bortree, 2014; Neill & Schauster, 2015). However, recent studies and industry experts have also pointed to the need for public relations education to focus on core public relations skills training such as writing and strategic thinking as social media and its digital measures continue to develop to account for interactivity, engagement, and conversational contexts (Anderson & Swenson, 2013; Neill & Schauster, 2015; Tam & Kim, 2019). This call to retain focus on core public relations skills in the age of social media practice reinforces findings from Paskin's (2013) survey of 113 communication professionals. According to Paskin, interview results showed that:

> ...skills such as writing, communication and strategic thinking over more novel skills, since these new skills depend on mastery of the basics. In essence, the results can be interpreted as showing that public relations professionals surveyed still expect, above anything, that graduating students receive a solid education of the basics skills before moving on to newer technical skills. (p. 252)

According to the most recent Commission on Public Relations Education report, research and analytics was one of the top four needed skills for entry-level hires according to both practitioners and educators (2018). Research and analytics, data analytics, and measurement and evaluation were also the three most desired areas of knowledge as noted (CPRE, 2018). Therefore, both analytics and digital measurement skills training and knowledge acquisition were at the top of the list of needs for public relations education according to the study.

Krishna et al.'s survey of public relations practitioners also confirmed that writing is still generally acknowledged as the most essential skill for new hires, but research and measurement skills were also noted as very important, especially among early career respondents. This study's findings support those of the most recent CPRE report and underscore the continued importance of writing skills, yet they also indicate that employers desire new hires with creative, critical, and analytical thinking abilities, as well as problem-solving and measurement experience (CPRE, 2018; Krishna et al., 2020).

Clearly, professional communicators are seeking a blend of skills in new public relations hires—both traditional skills such as writing and strategic thinking—with the addition of some experience in analytics and data analysis (Freberg & Kim, 2018; Kim & Freberg, 2016). According to a PRWeek report by Daniels (2018), industry professionals mostly looked for analytic thinking ability in new hires as well as the ability to write well and produce digital content. Considering the industry desire for a blend of traditional skills and digital analytics experience, it has become clear that there is an increasing need to incorporate analytics and data analysis into the public relations curriculum.

Analytics in Public Relations Education

Although basic skills are still highly regarded as the necessary "core" of public relations training by industry, the need for understanding analytic measures and expanding strategic thinking has been called for by both scholars and the industry. Indeed, building from Barcelona 2.0 and the changing profession, researchers argue that there is a strong need for analytics and data analysis to be introduced into the public relations curriculum (Chung & Taneja, 2016; Kent et al., 2011; Kim & Freberg, 2016; Stansberry, 2016).

Many traditional measures and evaluation frameworks are still useful, but others are troublesome in digital public relations contexts. For example, AVEs are still appearing in award-winning campaigns or as revamped new media measures (Schriner et al., 2017; Waddington, 2017) when more holistic analytic measures that account for context and social media communication between publics and organizations are available for digital campaign components (Ewing et al., 2018; Kent et al., 2011; Schriner et al., 2017). Despite Lindenmann's 2005 argument that there are ample tools to use to measure public relations efforts, the evolution of digital platforms continues to spur the development of new digital tools and measures.

Additionally, as practitioners have had to expand their basic skills to be able to evaluate social media efforts and communicate digital insights to management, digital analytics have increasingly become a key component of industry training and the public relations curriculum. Analytics, which is the method of logical analysis according to Merriam-Webster, is (in the simplest terms) the analysis of aggregate data. Analytics is the practice of considering multiple points of data or metrics (outputs) to arrive at insights and recommendations for reaching business goals or in the case of public relations, desired communication and relational outcomes.

Social media and web analytic tools such as Google Analytics have user-friendly interfaces that support both interpretation and communication of metrics and insights by novice as well as experienced communicators (Tam & Kim, 2019). Analytic data is especially helpful in social media listening (research) and evaluation as organizational digital platforms support real-time data collection, and insights can be gained quickly (Tam & Kim, 2019). This insight into audience social behavior is critical to digital public relations practice as it allows messages to be adapted or revised to address immediate needs as well as changing trends (Chung & Taneja, 2016; Wright & Hinson, 2017) and captures the impacts of online conversation on organization-controlled media such as the company website (Kent, et al., 2011). However, academics often struggle with how to approach analytics and digital evaluation pedagogically as many of the reporting tools and analytic platforms are proprietary, allowing only paid access, and social media sites continue their rapid evolution, making it difficult to keep up with the latest developments (Ewing et al., 2018; Freberg & Kim, 2018; Zhang & Freberg, 2018).

Methods for teaching digital public relations were investigated by an early proponent of analytic research and analysis (Kent, 2001), with the utilization of data from the internet taking center stage. Ethical issues such as tracking customer's buying habits and personal preferences were the focus, and assignments for a curriculum were proposed (Kent, 2001). This initial inquiry has expanded as the need for strategic and analytical thinking in practice has grown in alignment with the use of digital marketing and communications management suites such as Marketo and social media management and measurement tools like Hootsuite. Competency in analytics and such tools as evidenced by certification has been incorporated into public relations, advertising and marketing courses as studies have noted that this training provides young professionals with an advantage on the job market as employers seek evidence of social media and content management skills (Kent at al., 2011; Kinsky, et al. 2016; Freberg & Kim, 2018).

However, only recently have scholars begun to examine how digital analytics have been included in public relations courses. Ewing et al.'s 2018 study examined public relations course syllabi and the results of a Twitter chat on the topic to consider the skills and concepts included in these classes, as well as what learning outcomes (related to analytics) and what social media methods and certifications were included. The authors found that despite the critical need for positive student learning outcomes for analytics training, few of the syllabi they examined contained clear competencies (based on their wording).

> With the growing efforts to measure and evaluate digital activities, analytic competencies were a natural focus for social media and communication courses. Thus, it was expected that courses would have clearly identified learning outcomes for students related to digital analytics. However, few courses had outcomes specifically mentioning analytics. While educators embedded analytic concepts and training within their courses, the wording of their learning outcomes did not reflect the focus on digital analytic competencies. (Ewing, et al., p. 70)

Based on their study findings, ten analytics learning outcomes were proposed for educators to consider including in their syllabi and incorporating into future courses including using analytics tools and technologies to capture data, generate reports and glean insights and obtaining Hootsuite and/or Google Analytics certifications (Ewing, et al., 2018).

Recent research on the topic has also illustrated that students who had passed the Google Analytics certificate tests were highly interested in learning more about analytics (Meng et al., 2019). Additionally, Brunner et al., (2018) examined public relations job advertisements to identify skills and knowledge desired in new hires and found that most listed managerial skills such as project management. These researchers noted that knowledge of measurement and social media strategies and analytics would fall into the category of desired "managerial skills" listed in some job postings. Similarly, other recent studies have confirmed that professional public relations managers want to hire individuals with digital analytics and management training (Bajalia, 2020) as well as strong writing, critical thinking skills, and basic business acumen (Krishna, et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2019; Ragas, 2019).

The current research project builds on this previous study in an effort to identify which (if any) specific analytics skills and training industry professionals were seeking in new hires. Three research questions were developed to expand Ewing et al.'s initial investigation into analytic training incorporated into communication courses, while taking into consideration recent arguments for the need for both traditional skills and expanded strategic thinking and digital analytics training in public relations curriculum. Specifically:

RQ1: What digital analytics skills and training are agency professionals seeking in new hires?

RQ2: What specific social media listening and analytics tools and certifications are most valued by agency professionals?

RQ3: What emergent skills or training are becoming necessary in digital analytics?

Method

To answer these research questions, a series of respondent interviews with digital public relations and communication managers at leading agencies was conducted in February and March of 2020. The 2019 O'Dwyer's listing of the top independent agencies was used as the sampling frame. Researchers contacted public relations, digital media, and analytics professionals at the top fifty agencies of the O'Dwyer's list via direct email and LinkedIn direct messages with focus placed on practitioners who did analytics work and hired or supervised entry-level professionals engaging in analytics work. A total of 14 respondents participated in telephone interviews with the two primary researchers. Their job titles included Chief Analytics Officer, Senior Digital Strategist, Senior Vice President of Social and Digital Media, Senior Advisor, and Digital Account Executive.

After Institutional Review Board review and approval, researchers conducted the interviews using a standard interview guide (see appendix) that included questions regarding the respondent's role at their agency, skills they most want to see in new hires, and any emergent skills or training they believe are becoming necessary to the profession of digital public relations and campaign measurement.

With the participant's permission, all interviews were audio-recorded. Interviews averaged 24 minutes in length and totaled over five hours of recorded data. After each interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim resulting in 96 pages of single-spaced text.

Coding and Analysis

Following transcription, both researchers analyzed the interview data to identify themes related to the three research questions. This thematic analysis, which followed Smith's (1995) five-step process, was both inductive and deductive in its approach. It included specifically identifying responses corresponding to analytics education outcomes from previous research (Ewing, et al., 2018) but also allowed for emergent themes. The researchers independently read all transcripts multiple times. The transcripts were first read through without taking notes; upon the second reading, researchers highlighted sections relevant to the research questions and listed topics or codes relevant to the research questions. The researchers worked together to collapse these codes into broader themes or categories. Finally, researchers reread the transcripts to identify exemplar quotes that demonstrated the themes.

Results

Results indicate that the analytic skills and training most valuable to these professionals are not tool-specific certifications, but rather critical thinking and general measurement or analytics knowledge. Respondents also noted the need for new hires to have a general understanding of how analytic measures and metrics relate to business and organizational goals. This extends to having the mindset to consider public relations outcomes as both results and potential opportunities that organizations might leverage.

Even though some certifications were noted by professionals, few felt it was important for new hires to know how to use specific tools. Instead, they noted that it was more important to understand the measurement concepts behind them. Although there was little consistency among respondents regarding preferred analytics tools, most professionals reported that Google Analytics was valued more than other platform experience or certifications. When asked about emergent skills, professionals noted that a basic understanding of digital marketing measures and influencer marketing is valuable in today's digital agencies where integrated campaigns are generally the norm (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2017). Respondents also noted the emergence of more holistic measures for earned media such as story "trending" and "resonance" or pull-through.

Each of these study findings is discussed in more detail in the following section, arranged by theme in relation to the specific research question addressed. Anonymous respondent quotes are included for illustrative purposes.

RQ1. What analytic skills and training are agency professionals seeking for new hires to have in regard to analytics?

Four common themes emerged from the interviews to address this research question: critical thinking, general measurement knowledge, general business knowledge, and effective communication of data insights.

Critical Thinking

One of the most consistent themes to arise during the interviews was the perspective that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are more important than skills or experience using any specific analytics platform. All study participants commented in some way to underscore the importance of critical thinking in digital public relations and the need to provide students with integrated learning opportunities as part of their preparation for the job market. According to one respondent:

> Kind of what I look for is... are they thinking about best practices, but also, can they? Do they think in terms of, "Our clickthrough rate was up this month compared to last month—what does that mean?" You know, are they thinking about, "How do we track compared to sort of generic benchmark rates, or how are we looking compared to the same time last year? What does that mean for them?"

Another interviewee similarly noted:

> It starts with being a good information consumer and a sort of literacy—we have no shortage of data! It's a matter of can these individuals look at data and understand what it says and maybe what it doesn't say (or) what we might be able to determine from it…

General Measurement/Analytics Knowledge

This theme is related to critical thinking but many professionals commented on the need to have a general understanding of research and measurement that is not necessarily tied to specific online metrics or tools. Several interview respondents pointed out that it is just as important for digital communicators to understand what tools or specific metrics can't tell you as much as what they can tell you, such as being able to gauge engagement more holistically via content or website analytics versus relying on simple social media metrics. This finding aligns with critical thinking skills as they relate to the development of analytic skills and the ability to develop actionable insights from data. One participant described this as well as the need for knowing what questions to ask of the data:

> It's really about understanding what the metrics mean. So, yes, we need to understand, especially if it's an issue of understanding digital what sessions are, you know, where traffic is coming from, time on site, engagement, impressions, all of that. It's really important for people to understand ..."What does that mean?" So,

> you could say our site traffic went down this month, but the client doesn't necessarily share that (understanding). OK, why? What does that mean? What can you tell me from that? What if we do that differently? Being able to take those tools, read them, and yes, pull the numbers—but then understand what that means, and what we should be doing about it.

Several of the professionals specifically noted the need for new hires to have a general understanding of how analytics relate to specific business goals and be able to communicate this effectively with clients and managers. For example, one respondent noted this as understanding what metrics should be used to illustrate public relations impacts, "A lot of what is really important for us is making sure that we're communicating with clients the right metrics, but also the appropriate ones (for) PR." Another respondent described this ability as synthesis:

> We really want to make sure that, you know, any new hires are able to synthesize sort of the business objectives that we see from our clients—be able to convert those—and kind of translate those into a holistic sort of tracking and analytics approach. So, for us, a lot of times that means incorporating everything from social media to Google Analytics ...

Effective Communication of Data Insights

Another common theme was the importance of professionals being able to effectively communicate the data they gather using analytics tools. Specifically, the need to explain findings to clients and answer client questions was mentioned by multiple professionals. This ability to derive and effectively communicate insights and make data-driven recommendations to clients and management emerged at some point in all of the 14 interviews conducted for the survey. As one study respondent argued:

> At a minimum, I would expect people coming out of college to

> understand that there is context so that you've got to understand how to get/pull it out of the numbers and then analyze them, not just spit out a bunch of numbers.

A second interviewee elaborated further, noting the need for contextual understanding of metrics:

> Know that context is important.... at the minimum because I think a lot of times what I'll see from younger people or less experienced people, I should say, don't come in and spit out a bunch of numbers and reports and it's completely meaningless. You know, especially, our clients will look at a 12-page report and go, I don't know what the hell any of this means. Give me twelve pages of numbers and expect me to be impressed. You know, I would rather have one page of insight. And even if the numbers are bad, tell me that. Tell me what you're going to do to fix that and tell me what they need.

RQ2. What specific social media listening and analytics tools and certifications are most valued by agency professionals?

Two dominant themes arose from the interviews concerning the second research question: general knowledge of native platform analytics and social media management and listening tools. As previously mentioned, many professionals did not feel that it was important to know how to use specific tools, but rather to understand the concepts behind them and to be able to learn on the job. Once again, interviewees noted that it was the ability to draw actionable insights from the analytics drawn from various platforms was the most important thing they desired to see in early career professionals.

Interview respondents were asked to evaluate the usefulness of certification in various widely-used social media measurement, web analytics, and native platforms analytic tools on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 was less important and 5 was the most important. Although most of our analysis was qualitative, this quantitative portion allowed us to directly compare different tools. Results showed that Google Analytics certifications were highly valued (M = 4.08, SD = 1.00) as was Hootsuite and other social media management certifications (M = 4.25, SD = 0.75) as were evidence of Facebook and Twitter training (M = 4.33, SD = 1.15 and M = 4.00, SD = 1.35).

However, Instagram training (M = 3.75, SD = 1.29) was perceived as less valuable than Facebook and Twitter certifications due to these platforms' more developed analytics and reporting capabilities.

Proprietary platforms such as Brandwatch's Consumer Research (formerly Crimson Hexagon) and Meltwater were perceived as "nice to have" but not as important as Google Analytics training (M = 3.42, SD = 1.44).

General Knowledge of Native Platform Analytics

Most professionals felt it important for students to understand the basic reporting or insights offered by each platform but didn't feel knowledge beyond basic familiarity with the back end of social media platforms was needed. As one professional described:

> We really want someone to know how to use a media tool ...how to use Google Analytics to analyze how your page search is running, know how to use a tool that Facebook has to make sure that your program is running... We (are) technologically agnostic. So, we don't necessarily just use HubSpot, or just use Marketo. We like to cross-platform.... So, again, it's not one specific tool, but it's an understanding of how tools work and how to take those tools (and using critical thinking) to say what they mean—what can I get from some of these analytics?

Social Media Management and Listening Tools

Unsurprisingly, there was little consistency among respondents regarding specific tools—they reported valuing what they used at their agencies (as illustrated in the simple frequencies reported). However, during their interviews, professionals repeatedly returned back to note that that Google Analytics was valued more than any other platform knowledge or certification due to their opinion that this training and experience is highly-transferable toother platforms and digital measurement in general. One respondent explained:

> So, whether it's, you know, Google Analytics certification or Google ad certification...as long as they had some level of looking at the numbers ... the platforms. I mean, they have their own quirks. But being able to look at a table of numbers that are being reported out from something and think about that is a skill that translates well across platforms. If you kind of get it for one, you can it's easy for you to get it for others.

Another professional used an example from a recent hiring process to describe their thinking:

> (One) of the branches of my team is hiring for a junior right now. And we were doing a resume review a week ago. There are a few folks that have Google Analytics on their certification section and we definitely pull them out for a second look because it was two things. You can use that certification for the team at large. But it also speaks to a candidate's interest in sort of broadening their expertise so that they can speak, not about (not just) having experience (with) something, but actually credentialed experience. Hootsuite certifications I think are nice, but don't really move me much in terms of giving someone a second consideration for an interview, (but) Google Analytics—absolutely.

Other Certifications

Google Data Studio (and the introductory certification) was mentioned by several professionals due to its ability to integrate with Google Analytics and Google 360 platforms. Professionals noted it as a useful tool and because the need to produce visualizations for reporting is an increasingly important skill for young professionals to master.

> I would take Google Data Studio (training). It's really important because it lets you analyze a bunch of data layered on top of other data. You get a little bit more insight. No one ever talks about that is so important.

RQ3. What emergent skills or training are becoming necessary in digital analytics?

Finally, study respondents discussed some of the emergent skills that are needed for new professionals. Of those mentioned, new earned media measures such as "resonance" and a desire for new hires to have basic knowledge of integrated marketing and measurement including influencer marketing emerged as the most prevalent themes in the interviews. We also asked about the importance of storytelling skills specifically regarding storytelling with data (visually) and a few respondents noted that as a desired skill (but not as critical as being able to understand and communicate data-driven insights).

Influencer Marketing and Integrated Marketing Measures

In terms of emergent skills or what they see as becoming important in the industry related to analytics, several participants brought up influencer marketing and the need to evaluate the success of such partnerships. One of those individuals explained:

> I would say that influencer work has become and continues to become incredibly important. That's something that I wish I would have learned more when I was in school or maybe during internships. It was one of the areas that I really didn't have a whole lot of experience with when I entered the job force. And so, a lot of people think like, "Oh, you're putting together an influencer program, like you can find a certain type of influencer that has like five hundred thousand followers and they'll benefit a brand!"

> But they don't necessarily understand that they might have five hundred thousand followers but the percentage of how many followers the person has that are actually real people might be significantly lower, their engagement rate might be incredibly low. So, learning how (to do) influencer work…(has) been a main focus (recently). It's something that I think is pretty important.

Message Pull-Through or Resonance

Rather than just look at media placements, one professional spoke at length about his agency's work to help understand how earned media messages are resonating with their publics—basically, what impacts were discoverable beyond simple conversation or tabulation of media placements. This professional argued:

> With the amount of noise content data out there and with a lot of the sameness that's happening (and I'm speaking specifically to B2B enterprise techs that I work with) there needs to be something that helps a brand stand out and that's where the traditional comms work of narrative development comes in. So how do you create something that's compelling, that people are going to remember that they're going to be drawn to? And so, it's if you can include that in a metrics analytics standpoint, of message pull-through. Where is it resonating? What's resonating? And if it is—is it resonating with your key audience? I think the larger kind of context in terms of ... really looking at integrated campaigns and understanding how you can take the results from earned media, repurpose those into other types of channels in terms of owned content, in terms of your owned media and paid media—to then be able to retrieve the level of measurability that kind of earned media lacks. Right. So, I think that more and more we're going to be looking at earned media as part of a more holistic view.

Storytelling with Data

Several respondents noted that rather than just reporting numbers, having a deep understanding of how to use that data to "tell the story" in a manner that both management and clients can understand is highly valued. Respondents were not just referring to visuals (such as Google Data Studio) but the ability to effectively communicate insights based on the data itself. As one explained, data storytelling is not synonymous with visual storytelling:

> I think that it's important to be able to tell a story with the data—like using data to support a point of view or argument or to disprove a point of view or argument. In terms of the graphics that you use, I generally feel like that's definitely secondary. I mean it certainly helps.... But I think the most important thing is being able to tell the story with that data, because if you're having a good presentation meeting with the client, they're not looking in the slides anymore, they're looking and talking to YOU.

Discussion

In summary, study findings supported several of the recently recommended outcomes for public relations analytics education made in recent years, specifically, training students on basic measurement, and analytic reporting and analysis (CPRE, 2018; Brunner, et al., 2018; Ewing, et al., 2018; Freberg & Kim, 2018; Kent et al., 2011; Krishna, et al., 2020; Stansberry, 2016). Results also support the need for increased focus on teaching critical thinking, possibly via activities interpreting and communicating analytic insights using "live" analytics data (Meng, et al., 2019), as well as the integration of analytics training into existing courses (Adams et. al, 2020; Adams, et. al, 2019). This may be accomplished by working with a class client or nonprofit partner who is willing to provide access to their analytics account, or by simply using demonstration databases made available for such training (such as the Google Analytics

Merchandise data).

Additionally, arguments for the continued focus on other core public relations skills (effective communication and writing) were also supported as these competencies are just as required in digital practice as they ever were (Anderson & Swenson, 2013; Brunner, et al., 2018; Daniels, 2018; Paskin, 2013). Continued evolution toward more holistic measures of public relations and digital communication using analytics was discussed by all 14 of the study respondents, and AVEs were used by two respondents as a specific measure that should not be taught (or used) in digital campaigns following Barcelona 2.0. These findings echo recent calls by researchers that the process of public relations evaluation is evolving and that digital professionals have abandoned this earned media measure (Schriner et al., 2017; Waddington, 2017).

Specifically drawing from and building on the 2018 study by Ewing et al., results from this study further validate the following proposed learning objectives for public relations and communication analytics courses:

1) to identify the importance of online data in strategic planning and validating ROI;
2) to use analytics tools and technologies to capture data, generate reports and glean insights;
3) to articulate definitions and measurements of social media engagement and website traffic;
4) to apply basic numerical and statistical concepts to evaluate, plan, and implement strategic digital tactics;
5) to apply concepts and theories in presenting findings and in creating visualizations to share with management/client and;
6) to become Google Analytics certified.[1]

Other elements of the authors' recommended outcomes were supported by the results of this study, just not as strongly or consistently.

[1] Although study results were clear that analytic reporting and analysis were the desired skills and that certifications were not as important to respondents, several repeatedly noted that Google Analytics certifications were valuable as "knowledge transfer" and therefore, we consider this learning outcome strongly supported.

For example, although Hootsuite certification was certainly a desirable skill for most of the professionals interviewed, evidence of training in any other social media management platform (HubSpot, etc.) was also mentioned as just as favorable. However, when discussing management platforms at length, respondents repeated noted that Google Analytics training produced the most transferable knowledge and skills in their estimation.

These results reinforce the call for analytics and basic digital measurement training to be incorporated into the public relations curriculum (AMEC, 2015; CPRE, 2018; Kent et al., 2011) as well as basic social media research methodology (Stansberry, 2016); however, considering these results, special emphasis should be placed on critical/analytic thinking exercises using real data and not tool-specific knowledge. In addition, our results support recent calls for public relations students to gain knowledge in business and financial basics so that they can better understand how their efforts impact their organization's bottom line and support their work with other managerial functions (Ragas, 2019).

Limitations and Future Research

The current study was limited by the number of interview respondents. Although all 50 of the O'Dwyer's top agencies in the sample were solicited for participation, only 15 professionals had responded positively before the early March 2020 onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and therefore only 14 interviews were completed before major disruptions occurred prohibiting further participation during the study's timeframe.

Future research on the topic of analytics training in communication and public relations courses might consider how critical thinking and data analysis are actually being taught and how these activities or lessons relate to Ewing et al.'s (2018) proposed learning outcomes. Considering that this study's findings also support the scholarly argument for use of real data in such training (Kent et al., 2011; Stansberry, 2016), certifications obtained by watching videos and taking quizzes must not be the main pedagogical approach to meet course learning objectives that require analytic and critical thinking.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Analytics Education in PR

1. Can you tell me (in general) about the analytics skills and training you look for new hires to have who come to you from college public relations or strategic communications programs?
2. (Category-Measuring results) Building from that, what types of metrics do you think are most important for new PR professionals to understand? (Feel free to use any terms specific to reporting or tools.)
3. (Category-Measuring results) Do you think it is important to differentiate between volume metrics (# of retweets) and engagement metrics (sharing, commenting)?
4. (Category-Understanding context/critical thinking) How important is it for new hires to understand the context of analytic data and critical thinking? For example – is this something you expect them to learn "on the job" through experience or do you expect them to be able to interpret analytic data from the beginning?
5. (Category-Using tools and listening) What social media monitoring and analytic tools do you believe are most important to learn? (I'll list some for you, on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being absolutely essential, give me a number of how important you feel that tool is for students to learn.)

a. Google Analytics ________________
b. Google Adwords ________________
c. Hootsuite ________________
d. Facebook analytics ________________
e. Twitter analytics ________________
f. Instagram analytics ________________
g. Crimson Hexagon ________________
h. Meltwater ________________
i. Other (interviewer to note) ________________

6. (Category-Storytelling) How important is it for new PR hires to be experienced in storytelling skills (ie. Visualize data in meaningful ways or using data in digital storytelling/writing)?
7. (Category-Emergent Skills) Are there any other analytics or digital reporting skills or certifications that you SPECIFICALLY look for in new hires? Please describe if so.
8. (Category-Outcomes) Considering your most recent hires that graduated from a public relations or strategic communication program, were there any skills or training lacking from their experience? If so, can you describe?
9. (Category-Emergent Skills) Finally, are there any other skills or knowledge related to analytics that you feel are becoming necessary in professional practice?

Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 77-105

Digital Learning: Standards and Best Practices for Public Relations Education in Undergraduate Programs

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ABSTRACT

Traditional enrollment in higher education has been declining, while online enrollment has increased for the fourteenth year (Seaman et al., 2018, p.3). Fifty-three percent of public relations educators indicate offering online public relations courses, 6% with online undergraduate degrees (DiStaso, 2019), and the U.S. has 53 online public relations master's degrees. With COVID-19 and institutions switching to online and remote learning, higher education best practices for digital learning have become a primary consideration. However, there is limited, specific research on online education for public relations. A survey of 157 faculty and students with online public relations course experience identified best-practices for learning methods, engaging communication, and courses suited for online. Findings include recommendations for specific pedagogical approaches appropriate for particular public relations courses and recommendations for the most effective course communication practices to guide faculty development, resources, assessment, and strategic pedagogical practices.

Keywords: public relations pedagogy, online learning, teaching public relations, digital learning, digital pedagogy

Acknowledgment: This study is created from the workgroup with the Commission for PR Education's focus on digital learning in Public Relations

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted May 18, 2020. Revisions submitted August 24, 2020; December 1, 2020; and February 18, 2021. Manuscript accepted for publication March 22, 2021. First published online September 2021.

With the impact of COVID-19 and institutions worldwide switching to online and remote learning, higher education best practices for digital learning became a primary consideration for administrators, faculty, and students alike. To provide a foundation of support for best practices within the discipline of public relations, the Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State, Educators and Practitioners report issued by the Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) identified online education in public relations with two key factors. The report identified online learning as an area that will influence both the future of public relations and an area requiring further clarification for guidelines and standards. Building from the recommendation for further guidelines, this study was designed to explore areas critical to future success and effectiveness in online public relations undergraduate education.

Literature Review

Online Learning Growth and Perceptions

As the higher education landscape continues to shift, online learning represents both a sector for growing enrollment and opportunities for more students and a sector that necessitates new standards and practices within the academy (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). In fact, as traditional enrollment declines for institutions of higher education, online enrollment is continuing to increase for the fourteenth year in a row (Seaman et al., 2018). Online learning falls under the broader sector of distance education, allowing students to engage with faculty and programs that are not necessarily geographically close. As more programs and institutions adopt digital tools to expand education's reach, online learning has taken many forms. Courses that leverage online learning for 30% – 80% of the course are considered hybrid and blend a traditional face-to-face approach with online education. Those that deliver 80% or more of the content digitally are considered fully online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

The reality is, however, that one of the most significant criticisms of online education is that it will not deliver the same quality or breadth of education that a traditional, face-to-face education delivers (Chao et al., 2006; Saad et al., Busteed, & Ogisi, 2013). Concerns have included "teaching effectiveness, faculty-to-student ratios, attrition rates, student satisfaction, and institutional resources invested in online delivery" as primary concerns in online learning (Chao et al., 2006, p. 1). While studies have identified this perception for a number of years, it has been heightened in the general public due to the experience many students had transitioning into an online learning environment in the middle of a semester due to the COVID-19 (Lederman, 2020). Studies suggest that communication or engagement is critical for successful online learning (Cole et al., 2014). In other words, communication with faculty in order to recruit, equip, and prepare them for teaching online is critical. Furthermore, it is equally important to cultivate a vibrant communication environment within online courses that will facilitate student/faculty interaction, engagement with assignments and course expectations, and peer-to-peer connection.

No One-Size Fits All Approach to Online Learning

One significant area of communication deals with defining, developing, and equipping online educators. While some institutions seem to be moving toward the construct that all educators should be able to teach in any modality, some studies indicate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to online faculty. Studies suggest that some faculty may thrive in an online environment, and others may not be able to based on qualifications, experience, and perceptions held by the educators (Kim & Freberg, 2018). Some faculty may prefer to teach either traditional or online courses, or a combination of those, while others may enjoy a hybrid model. Current research suggests that faculty who teach in online programs must effectively manage a digital setting, and training is a central component of effective online education. As with a traditional classroom, development related to integrating student evaluations and voices (Gómez-Rey et al., 2018; Secret et al., 2016), assessment practices (Tinoca & Oliveira, 2013), and professional training opportunities (Brinkley-Etzkorn, 2018; Lawrence & Tar, 2018) influence perceptions about online education (Frazer et al., 2017).

Once institutions clarify who will (or should) teach online courses, it is equally important to communicate information regarding processes to develop a course, run a course, and manage technical components to a course. A survey of faculty by Inside Higher Ed and Gallup found nine out of 10 faculty reported being involved in online or hybrid course design. However, only 25% reported using an instructional designer (Jaschik & Lederman, 2018). Research suggests there are different ways of training faculty to teach online. Some institutions require faculty to complete training, while others do not, and some have faculty design their online courses while others utilize instructional designers (Lowenthal et al., 2019). Support can come from the school, institution, or outside vendor and varies from supplying instructional designers, providing training, and providing technical support. This support can take the form of online training, workshops, one-on-one, and informal mentoring for technology, Learning Management Systems, course design, pedagogy, assessment, and accessibility (Andrade et al., 2019). While communicating to faculty about how to define, develop, and cultivate excellence as an educator is important, it is also critical that communication about learning and expectations occurs for students within online courses.

Communication Practices in Online Environments

Communication in an online learning environment is extremely important (Dixson, 2017; Hajibayova, 2017). It can influence students' learning, motivation, desire to stay enrolled, and their belief that they are connected to peers and the faculty member. Many students identify the lack of communication as one of the most significant challenges in online learning and the reason they feel isolated (Chao et al., 2006; Cole et al., 2014).

Out-of-Class Communication. Previous studies have confirmed the role of communication in education, with a growing body of research focusing specifically on out-of-class communication (OCC) (Kim, 2018). In an online class, intentionally building OCC between faculty and students is a critical element to consider. This is because OCC has been linked to the ability for students to adjust to the academy, retention in learning, perceptions of faculty members, and the potential to increase motivation among students in courses (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Jaasma & Koper, 2002; Kim, 2017; Terenzini et al., 1996). Thus, traditional communication elements to courses and OCC are important when considering best practices for the future of online learning in public relations education.

Course Related Communication. Scholars have. Additionally, discussion and interactive assignments that prompt students with thought-provoking real-world situation questions invite the sharing of diverse opinions, and personal perspectives tend to elicit more engagement (Buelow et al., 2018).

While there are best practices for communication, research has found that students can vary in their capabilities of performing well in an online teaching environment. Schommer-Aikins and Easter (2018) found that students with higher cognitive flexibility were better at exploring online sources, monitoring their success, and engaging with peers and instructors online. While it may seem to mirror what educators encounter in traditional classrooms, the study also found that students with high procrastination were less capable of time management (Aikin & Easter, 2018). Additionally, students that had a strong need for closure were less capable of managing stress in an online course environment.

These differing capabilities must be considered by online faculty. In an online environment, these types of nuances significantly influence not only an individual student but the class culture. In public relations, for example, we often have many team-based and group activities (Smallwood & Brunner, 2017). While group or team-based activities is always challenging for groups, in an online environment it can prove even more complex., It is easy for an educator to not see this issue for group-learning if consistent and regular communication is not designed as a key component to the course.

In light of the need for sound assessment practices and multi-levels, regular and substantive communication practices, careful attention should be given to course sizes. There are many factors institutions face when determining course sizes. The administration has the responsibility of ensuring that courses are financially feasible and profitable. This reality can cause courses to have significant numbers of students enrolling while unintentionally diminishing the quality of assessment (and thus, learning) to reducing if not removing substantive communication practices (D'Orio, 2017). Thus, once a threshold for profit and minimum enrollment requirements have been established, institutions should review what else is required to ensure not only profitability but effective learning occurs in each course.

One area that seems to influence perceptions, and the belief about whether students are getting personal communication and education, is class size. Scholars have engaged in various studies to examine the topic of online course enrollment. Taft et al. (2011) recommend a trifecta to determine optimal course sizes, including Bloom's taxonomy, engagement, and assignments or inquiry models. Using these three factors, they recommend large courses have fewer than 30 students, medium courses have 16-30, and small courses have fewer than 15. Beyond the academy, outside organizations have recognized the importance of class size on education quality. US News & World Report, for example, points out the relationship between class size and education, focusing on the student experience of personal presence and interaction with faculty (Best Colleges, n.d.; Quillen, 2015). There are models with much larger student enrollments, with some programs having 150 enrolled in a course (Haynie, 2014) – or other models such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which could have hundreds of students. Students also hold unique views of class size (Morrison, 2015). Thus, setting class sizes becomes quite complicated when incorporating financial realities and implications, faculty load and bandwidth, resources for programs or online courses, and qualified interaction providing substantive content for students.

Online education delivery of communication degrees is growing. A 2015 survey of 61 graduate communication degrees in the US found that only 11% indicated the use of online delivery mode, and just 10% indicated the use of a hybrid model (Quesenberry et al., 2015). By 2019 another survey found 53 fully online public relations and strategic communication master's programs in the US (Weissman et al., 2019). Additionally, a survey in the Commission on Public Relations Education Report found 53% of public relations educators now indicate their program offers online public relations courses, and 6% have an entirely online undergraduate degree (DiStaso, 2019).

While there is a significant body of research that addresses general best practices and standards for online education, the dramatic growth of online course delivery for both public relations undergraduate and graduate courses and degrees points toward a need for new research. The following research questions have yet to be explicitly addressed for public relations education.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of online learning methods among those who have taught and taken an online public relations course?

RQ2: What pedagogical practices are best suited for specific public relations courses?

RQ3: What are effective communication practices within online public relations courses?

Method

Survey Respondents & Recruitment

While research exists on particular pedagogical practices, primary research was conducted to learn more about particular perspectives related to courses recommended by the Commission on Public Relations Education. An online survey was disseminated in Spring 2019 by the primary researchers and key educational bodies to reach faculty and students. Requests to participate included liaison groups such as the Public Relations Divisions in the Association for Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication, the International Communication Association, and the National Communication Association, as well as the Public Relations Society of America Educators Academy.

As indicated above, the survey used respondent-driven snowballing to recruit participants, seeking to only include those faculty who have taught or students who had taken an online public relations course. This approach was used so that those who responded would have tangible experience in mind as they considered the items on the survey, rather than including a wider sample that would be responding based on speculation or perceptions of an online learning course, without having had an actual online class experience in that learning environment. While the idea of snowball sampling has raised concerns with some scholars, due to the potential integration of a biased sample (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010), other scholars suggest that there is validity in this recruitment method for certain types of audiences. Using a snowball technique is useful when researchers need “referrals made by people who share or know others who present characteristics that are of research interest” for the study (Lopes et al., 1996, p. 1268). As this study sought to recruit only public relations faculty or students who had participated in an online public relations course, snowball sampling allowed the above networks to connect people for the "identification of such populations requiring knowledge of insiders who can locate people willing to participate in the study," (Lopes et al., 1996, p. 1268). In other words, snowball sampling allowed the researcher to connect with people who had knowledge about others that also participated in an online PR course. In addition, scholars argue that using snowballing as a technique does not immediately result in an uncontrolled method of data collection:

> As with random sampling, the snowballing method is not as uncontrolled as its name implied. The researcher is deeply involved in developing and managing the origination and progress of the sample and seeks to ensure at all times that the chain of referrals remains within limitations that are relevant to the study. (Etikan et al., 2015, p. 1)

Thus, as a study designed to receive insight only from those who enrolled or taught a public relations course in an online environment, snowballing allowed for the identification and recruitment of this particular sample through the network of national PR educator affiliations.

There were 157 respondents, 51.9% faculty, and 48.1% students. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the participants as identified by the status in the academy. Of the participants who reported their age, the majority of participants were 18 to 24 years old (n=59, 37.6%), followed by 35 to 44 years old (n=30, 19.1%). The complete breakdown by age is in Table 2.

Instrument Design

The survey instrument included core demographic information at the beginning, followed by multiple scale questions that examined perceptions of online learning pedagogical methods. The initial scale question asked participants to respond to 16 different pedagogical methods that they felt would be "most appropriate" to online learning. If respondents marked any online learning method as one that "should never be used in online education," then that option would not appear on future questions.

Table 1

Breakdown of Participant Status and Title

Participant Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Professor	19	12.1	13.9
Associate Professor	13	8.3	9.5
Assistant Professor	14	8.9	10.2
Instructor (Full-Time)	9	5.7	6.6
Adjunct	16	10.2	11.7
Freshman PR Student	5	3.2	3.6
Sophomore PR Student	11	7.0	8.0
Junior PR Student	22	14.0	16.1
Senior PR Student	20	12.7	14.6
Alumni from PR Program	8	5.1	5.8

Table 2

Breakdown of Participant Ages

Participant Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18 to 24	59	37.6	43.1
25 to 34	10	6.4	7.3
35 to 44	30	19.1	21.9
45 to 54	18	11.5	13.1
55 to 64	11	7.0	6.0
65 to 74	9	5.7	6.6

Next, respondents were presented with a series of questions about the same methods relating to specific public relations courses. These courses were identified from requirements in the Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) standards and the leading courses in the curriculum. The courses included were: 1) Strategic public relations planning (such as creating a campaign or initiative for a client); 2) Public relations writing; 3) Public relations research; 4) Public relations ethics; 5) Public relations principles; 6) Public relations theory; 7) Public relations management; 8) New technologies in public relations; 9) Internships.

For each course, respondents were asked to identify if they had previously taken or taught the course online. If they responded positively, they were then asked to identify which pedagogical methods were most suited to that topic in an online environment. If they responded that they had not taken or taught the course online, they were automatically advanced to the next course questions. This allowed for greater clarity in that respondents provided feedback on courses they had personally experienced in an online environment, giving precise insight on particular courses versus online education in general for public relations. Finally, a series of questions concluded the survey, which examined communication best-practices within a course between peers, between a faculty member and individual student, and a faculty member to the course as a whole. The section concluded with scale questions exploring the best practices for helping students succeed in assignments in an online environment.

Analysis

Participant Demographic and Base Experience Analysis

An important differentiation in this was understanding the level and breadth of experience with online education. When asked how many courses they had taken online, the majority of students had taken 6+ (n = 20, 31.3%), followed by students who had taken 3 (n = 14, 21.9%) and those that had taken 4 courses (n = 12, 18.8%). The majority of faculty reported teaching more than 6+ courses (n = 49, 69.0%), with the next majority teaching 3 courses (n = 8, 11.3%). Of those who responded, 40% (n = 55) reported being from a public institution, and 59.9% (n = 82) reported being from a private institution. Nearly half (n = 67, 48.9%) reported being at a medium size (1,000-8,000) person institution, with

42.3% (*n* = 58) reporting being at a large institution (8,000+), and only 8.8% (*n* = 12) reporting being at a small institution (less than 1,000). The survey was released globally, and participants represented locations from the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and South America. The majority of respondents were from the United States, with only 9.41% (*n* = 13) identifying as being from another geographic location.

Perceptions of Online Learning Methods in Public Relations Courses

Respondents were asked to rank what they felt were the pedagogical methods most important to teaching or learning PR in an online environment. From this, respondents identified the top five pedagogical methods or tools as 1) writing assignments (*n* = 125, *M* = 4.44); 2) videos (*n* = 124, *M* = 4.38); 3) reading, such as blogs and articles (*n* = 125, *M* = 4.30); 4) messaging (*n* = 124, *M* = 4.08); and 5) discussion boards (*n* =125, *M* = 4.07). In order to determine whether there is a difference in perception of the effectiveness of online educational pedagogy practices between faculty and students, the following analysis was performed using a T-test on each of the top methods:

Faculty will differ from students in perceptions of the appropriateness of writing as a pedagogical tool in online courses. The T-test was significant, revealing a higher mean among faculty than among students regarding the appropriateness of writing as a pedagogical tool: Faculty (*n* = 69, *M* = 4.75, *SD* = .50) and students (*n* = 55, *M* = 4.03, *SD* = .86), $t(82.00) = 5.50$, $p<.001$.

Faculty members will differ from students in their perceptions of the appropriateness of videos as a pedagogical tool in online courses. The T-test was significant, revealing a higher mean among faculty than among students regarding the appropriateness of videos as a pedagogical tool: Faculty (*n* =69, *M* = 4.75, *SD* = .50) and students (*n* = 55, *M* = 4.03, *SD* = .86), $t(82.00) = 5.50$, $p<.001$.

Faculty will differ from students in perceptions of the appropriateness of reading as a pedagogical tool in online courses. The T-test was significant, revealing a higher mean among faculty than among students regarding the appropriateness of reading as a pedagogical tool: Faculty (n = 69, M = 4.70, SD = .58) and students (n = 55, M = 3.80, SD = 1.04, t(79.73) = 5.71, p<.001.

Faculty will differ from students in perceptions of the appropriateness of messaging as a pedagogical tool in online courses. The T-test was not found to be significant, even though the mean among students was higher compared to faculty regarding the appropriateness of messaging as a pedagogical tool: Faculty (n = 69, M = 4.03, SD = .90) and students (n = 55, M = 4.16, SD = .83), t(121) = -.851, p = .396

Faculty will differ from students in perceptions of the appropriateness of discussion boards as a pedagogical tool in online courses. The T-test was significant, revealing a higher mean among faculty than among students regarding the appropriateness of discussion boards as a pedagogical tool: Faculty (n=69, M = 4.40, SD = .83) and students (n= 55, M = 3.65, SD = 1.08), t(99.33) = 4.19, p<.001.

Public Relations Course Specific Pedagogical Practices

Respondents were asked to respond to the types of pedagogical approaches appropriate to particular courses. Only participants who had taken a course in the subject within an online environment were able to respond to that portion of the research instrument. While this reduced the number of respondents for various courses, it provided a more precise response in that the respondents had a tangible experience in mind as they reflected on the survey items rather than conjecturing about an experience with which they did not have familiarity. The courses were 1) Strategic Public Relations Planning (n = 53); 2) Public Relations Writing (n = 46); 3) Public Relations Research (n = 26); 4) Public Relations Ethics (n = 13); 5) Public Relations Principles (n = 41); 6) Public Relations Theory (n = 21); 7) Public Relations Management (n = 14); 8) New Technologies in PR (*n* = 49); and 9) Internships (*n* = 40). One course that many participants mentioned having taken online but that was not included in this study was crisis communication. The following represent the overall analysis (faculty and students) in a particular course.

Strategic Public Relations Planning. The top recommendation for this course is to use writing assignments (*M* = 4.46); followed by the use of discussion boards (*M* = 4.20) presentations (*M* = 4.18), readings (*M* = 4.18) and case simulations (*M* = 4.12).

Public Relations Writing. The highest recommendation was writing assignments (*M* = 4.78), followed by readings (*M* = 4.49), discussion boards (*M* = 4.02), social media assignments (*M* = 3.98), and textbooks (*M* = 3.86).

Public Relations Research. The top pedagogical recommendation was the use of readings (*M* = 4.54), closely followed by writing assignments (*M* = 4.5), presentations (*M* = 4.14), videos (*M* = 4.08), and textbooks (*M* = 4.05).

Public Relations Ethics. The top methodological tool was readings (*M* = 4.5), followed by videos (*M* = 4.45), writing assignments (4.36), discussion boards (*M* = 4.36) and case simulations (*M* = 4.27).

Public Relations Principles. The majority recommended the use of readings (*M* = 4.38), followed by textbooks (*M* = 4.34); videos (*M* = 4.33), writing assignments (*M* = 4.32); and discussion boards (*M* = 4.20). Public Relations Theory. The top methodological recommendation was writing assignments (*M* = 4.7), followed by reading (*M* = 4.65), discussion boards (*M* = 4.4), textbooks (*M* = 4.28), and videos (*M* = 4.1).

PR Management. The majority recommended writing assignments (*M* = 4.83), followed by discussion boards (*M* = 4.75), readings (*M* = 4.67), case simulations (*M* = 4.5), and videos (*M* = 4.42).

New Technology in Public Relations. The top methodology recommended was social media assignments (*M* = 4.55), followed by videos (*M* = 4.16), writing assignments (*M* = 4.16), discussion boards (*M* = 3.96) and case simulations (*M* = 3.87).

PR Internships. While this course skewed much lower than others in terms of participants agreeing particular methodologies were helpful, the top recommendation was writing assignments (*M* = 3.46), discussion boards (*M* = 3.38), messaging (*M* = 3.24), readings (*M* = 3.16) and video conferencing (*M* = 2.75).

A summary of the top pedagogical practices by course within an online learning modality is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Top Pedagogical Practices by Course Within an Online Learning Modality

Course	1st Practice	2nd Practice	3rd Practice
PR Writing	Writing Assignments	Reading	Discussion Board
PR Research	Reading	Writing Assignments	Presentation
PR Ethics	Reading	Video	Writing Assignment
PR Principles	Reading	Textbook	Videos
PR Theory	Writing Assignments	Reading	Discussion Board
PR Management	Writing Assignments	Discussion Boards	Reading
New Tech in PR	SM Assignments	Video	Reading
PR Internship	Writing Assignments	Discussion Boards	Reading

Online Public Relations Course Communication Practices

Peer-to-Peer Communication. Students and faculty were asked to identify the most important communication method among peers in a course to explore best practices and perceptions of communication within online courses. With the options of 1) discussion boards; 2) video conferences; 3) social media; 4) email; 5) group text messages, and 6) phone calls, the most recommended method was email (*n* = 111, *M* = 4.25, *SD* = .90).

Faculty to Individual Student Communication. Using the same options as above, respondents identified that email was the best method for faculty-to-individual-student communication in online courses (n = 111, M = 4.75, SD = .58).

Faculty to Class Communication. Using the same options as above, respondents identified that email was the best option for faculty-to-class communication (n = 104, M = 4.73, SD = .60).

Table 4

Top Communication Practices by Type Within an Online Learning Modality

Respondent Type	Communication	1st Practice	2nd Practice	3rd Practice	4th Practice	5th Practice	6th Practice
Faculty	Peer to Peer	Discussion Boards	Email	Group Text Message	Video Conference	Social Media	Phone Calls
Current Students	Peer to Peer	Email	Group Text Message	Discussion Boards	Social Media	Video Conference	Phone Calls
Faculty	Faculty to Individual Student	Email	Discussion Boards	Video Conference	Phone Call	Social Media	Group Text Message
Current Students	Faculty to Indvidual Student	Email	Video Conference	Discussion Boards	Social Media	Group Text Message	Phone Call
Faculty	Faculty to Class	Email	Discussion Boards	Video Conference	Social Media	Group Text Message	Phone Call
Current Students	Faculty to Class	Email	Video Conference	Discussion Board	Social Media	Group Text Message	Phone Call

Success and Feedback for Assignments

Assignment Feedback. When asking what assignment feedback is most “significant to helping students learn and improve,” respondents were given the following options: 1) Graded rubrics; 2) Written feedback; 3) Audio feedback; 4) Video feedback; 5) A class announcement.

Respondents indicated that the most significant option would be written feedback (n = 104, M = 4.78, SD = .56). The second highest recommendation was a graded rubric (*n* = 103, *M* = 4.31, *SD* = .90). Particularly due to perceptions between educators compared to students related to feedback, a T-test was performed on each of the feedback methods to see if there were statistical differences between faculty and students. There were statistically significant differences between faculty (*n* = 64, *M* =4.89, *SD* =.40) and students (*n* = 40, *M* = 4.6, *SD* = .71) related to the importance of written feedback *t*(56.01)=3.49, *p*=.001. Similarly, there was statistically significant differences between faculty (*n* = 64, *M* = 4.56, *SD* =.66) and students (*n* = 39, *M* = 3.90, *SD* = 1.07) related to the importance of written feedback *t*(56.01)=3.49, *p* = .001. In both instances, the faculty mean was higher than students.

Table 5

Top Pedagogical Practices for Assignments on Online Learning Modality

Respondent Type	Communication	1st Practice	2nd Practice	3rd Practice	4th Practice	5th Practice
Faculty	Assignment Feedback	Written Feedback	Graded Rubric	Class Announcement	Video Feedback	Audio Feedback
Current Students	Assignment Feedback	Written Feedback	Graded Rubric	Class Announcement	Audio Feedback	Video Feedback
Faculty	Assignment Success	Outlined Instructions	Rubric Used to Score Assignments	Example Projects	Common Questions Document	Group Video Conference to Ask Questions
Current Students	Assignment Success	Example Projects	Outlined Instructions	Rubric Used to Score Assignmetns	Common Questions Document	Group Video Conference to Ask Questions

Success for Assignments. Lastly, students were asked what communication would best position them for success in online learning, particularly focusing on assignments and communication before they complete the project. Respondents could select 1) examples of a project; 2) outlined instructions; 3) a rubric that will be used to score the project;

4) A "common questions" document"; and 5) a group video conference to ask questions. The highest response was "outlined instructions" (n = 104, M = 4.74, SD = 5.74). This was followed by "a rubric that will be used to score the project" (n = 104, M = 4.53, SD = .64) and "examples of a project" (n = 104, M = 4.5, SD = .71). When comparing the two groups separately (students to faculty), there were differences noted. Students, when analyzed independently, identified "example projects" as the most significant way to prepare for success (n = 40, M = 4.73, SD = .72) and rated "outlined instructions" as the second most significant (n = 40, M = 4.6, SD = .74).

Discussion

RQ1: What are the perceptions of online learning methods among those who have taught and taken an online public relations course?

To set the foundation for this study, the researchers first wanted to establish a benchmark for understanding the general perceptions of pedagogical practices among those engaged with online learning. One significant finding was that respondents indicated that the primary choice of pedagogy among both faculty and students for courses is writing assignments. While faculty and student respondents did provide statistically significant differences related to the perceptions held of online learning, there were commonalities among pedagogical preferences that are helpful to note. For example, perceptions of pedagogical approaches, such as using video, blogs, and articles, and digital engagement opportunities such as messaging/discussion boards, were top preferences among participants. This contrasts with some traditional pedagogical approaches, such as using a textbook, slideshows, and group projects.

This general finding helps lay a foundation for where educators and students align in their approach to online learning. These findings can help navigate some critical considerations due to the recent highlighting of student preparedness and equity in online education. For example, an on-going conversation in some institutions has been the rising cost of textbooks and the disparity it creates among students who have a lower socio-economic background. However, this study indicates that educators and students find online articles, blogs, and resources as a stronger pedagogical approach than textbooks in some courses, though not in all. This could mean that, for particular classes and subject matters, faculty may want to opt for online resources as class reading versus a traditional textbook. Thus, this finding for online education may help both in focusing on developing more rigorous learning environments by using preferred approaches among the key stakeholders in online learning. In addition to general approaches for online learning, the researchers wanted to identify particular pedagogical and communication practices that would directly impact public relations education in an online environment.

RQ2: What pedagogical practices are best suited for specific public relations courses?

This study found that, while faculty and students hold perceptions of pedagogical approaches in online learning in general, there is a customization that is needed based on the particular discipline and course being taught. Even in the midst of a smaller sample size, as this study included only respondents who had direct experience with the course, there are helpful insights for the development and enhancement of online public relations education. For example, specific courses benefit from case studies and social media more than other courses may. This finding further supports the idea of avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches to online education. Just as in the traditional classroom, public relations faculty have adopted particular pedagogical approaches for topics (like ethics case studies and crisis PR simulations), the online environment needs to be equally customized.

While respondents continued to indicate writing assignments and reading (though not textbooks) as primary preferred pedagogical approaches, it is noteworthy that the use of discussion boards and presentations were often not identified. Also, while the use of certain pedagogical practices, such as video conferencing, seems to be a growing expectation, respondents identified pedagogical practices that were more about content absorption (reading) and content mastery illustration (such as writing) as preferred approaches. This could be due to the perception that there is busy work created in online courses, potentially enforcing the perception that online courses are less valuable than traditional ones. Also, respondents identified particular approaches for courses, such as social media assignments, only being among the top five pedagogical approaches for a technology class or video conferencing only being selected in the internship course. This seems to indicate that faculty must carefully consider the learning outcomes and the direct connection to those outcomes for any activity or interaction embedded into online courses. Also, faculty should carefully evaluate whether specific components for courses are present because they are traditionally included (like a textbook or discussion board) or whether those elements are central to the learning for that topic.

While previous research addresses the topic of pedagogical methods in general, this study provides unique insight into perceptions related to core public relations courses. By applying these recommendations, faculty may be better able to cultivate a productive learning environment for students that is uniquely suited, not only to our discipline but also to the niche topic of the course.

RQ3: What are effective communication practices within online public relations courses?

Communication within a learning community contributes to learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction. This study indicated that while online learning communities have many digital options, email seems to remain a preferred communication method to bolster connections among peers, faculty, and the class as a whole. It could be that the automation of feedback and communication embedded into online courses gives the impression of a lack of intentionality – and thus, an email creates a feeling of immediacy and intention. This finding seems to indicate that purposefully integrating communication practices outside of the learning management system could be powerful for online courses. While communication is key for all courses, online faculty must consider how students perceive the communication and then create opportunities for OCC that feel authentic to students rather than merely an extension of what faculty have to do as part of a class.

Additionally, when it comes to communicating about assignments, respondents indicated a preference for customized feedback that is written. While online learning has developed a seamlessly integrated rubric option, the potential for learning based on qualitative feedback seems to be the most preferred method. These two findings, related to OCC and individual assignment feedback, are particularly noteworthy when administrators and faculty consider the overall construct of an online faculty member. In a traditional course, faculty can individually interact with students as they walk into class, perhaps as they pass on campus or when they come into the office. These all give opportunities for OCC to occur very naturally and without much additional time. Also, in a traditional course, faculty can provide feedback to the class as a whole with everyone in the room while also highlighting and noting particular elements for student work. However, in online learning, OCC and assignment feedback takes on a different form. It all requires much more individualization and purposeful investment. Thus, online educators should anticipate courses taking longer than a traditional course, not because the infrastructure is created each time anew, but because individual communication requires so much each time the course is run. While this is a challenge that faculty need to recognize, and administration should consider for faculty load and obligations, it is also a value-proposition for students that could position online learning in a more positive light. While there are criticisms of online learning being lesser compared to traditional, the respondents seem to indicate that the investment of intentional, customized communication represents an opportunity to create a differential that students would find attractive and appealing for an educational choice.

Lastly, to prepare ahead of time, faculty and students recommend examples of projects, rubrics, and outlined instructions. This allows a more on-demand opportunity for students to understand the expectations and how the outcomes will be evaluated on various projects. Unlike the above finding related to communication, the focus on developing examples, rubrics, and outlined instructions is one that faculty can prepare prior to the course launching. Then, the faculty are able to benefit throughout the term and in future terms as the course runs again.
While faculty and students differ in the order of importance for particular pedagogical approaches or assignments, these areas remain the most significant in the perception of both parties to yield the best success within an online course.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study was the respondent size for the course-specific analysis. In light of this, the findings are challenging to generalize to a larger population due to the limited number of responses. However, future studies would be able to build on these initial findings and further examine the results to verify if they continue to be supported with a higher number of respondents. In addition, in light of COVID-19, more faculty and students will now be able to respond to studies such as this with personal experience, given the volume of individuals who participated in online education during the pandemic. Future research would benefit from examining how this experience has now shaped perceptions and communication practices within public relations courses, particularly as some courses were infrequently (if ever) offered in an online format prior to the pandemic.

Conclusion

This study focused on exploring the learning practices through digital learning amongst students and faculty in public relations. Online teaching will continue to grow and will be an essential skill faculty need to possess moving forward in higher education. In light of COVID-19, more instructors have been asked to bring their courses online immediately to address the needs of their respective institutions. Future research could explore the role of digital learning practices in a crisis and how students and faculty perceive their challenges and opportunities together. Also, future research could explore the new necessary skills and areas within digital learning which students need to possess when they enter the industry. Hosting webinars, moderating conference calls, promoting online digital summits, and more are just some of the new potential online assignments that need to be tested, evaluated, and discussed in digital learning research.

With the rapid and expected continual growth of digital learning, the future of public relations education will be significantly impacted by the standards and practices established by institutions. Focusing on appropriate faculty development, essential resources, effective assessment, and strategic pedagogical practices throughout the curriculum are key methods for programs to ensure effective learning environments.

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 106-141

Student-Run Agencies Best Practices: Replicating the Professional Agency Experience to Prepare Budding Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

Preparing students to become practitioners includes immersion in public relations theory and practical training. While much of this is accomplished in traditional college classrooms, student-run agencies (SRAs) add an additional learning environment that includes experience in professionalism and familiarity with practices, skills and protocols necessary for future success. While often similarly structured as professional agencies, SRAs provide an integrated learning environment that encompasses professionalism. This research is built on two theoretical streams, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and professionalism theory (Cruess, 2006). Describing best practices in policies, tactics and techniques, this study provides insights into the what, the why and the how of fostering professionalism in undergraduates via the SRA's unique and immersive experience to prepare students for post-graduate careers.

Keywords: student-run agencies/firms, professionalism, hard/soft skills, best practices, integrative learning

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted July 6, 2020. Revision submitted October 30, 2020. Manuscript accepted for publication January 7, 2021. First published online September 2021.

Defining an occupation as a profession carries with it many challenges. The profession of public relations is not an exception. As Sriramesh and Hornaman (2006) pointed out, the debate of "is PR a profession?" ran on for over two decades.

While at the time, the researchers pointed out that public relations was not yet a profession, based on a consensus of available research, Sriramesh and Hornaman (2006) did offer that attainment of a professional status for public relations must include items like a code of ethics and professional values and norms, service to the public interest, cultivation of specialized research and technical skills, possession of a body of esoteric knowledge, specialized and standardized education, the offer of a unique service and establishment of robust professional organizations and having autonomy in organizations to make communication-related decisions.

The student-run agency (SRA) in its most basic form provides several aspects of this assertion including providing specialized education that can also serve the public interest, reinforced training in professional values and norms, unique development of technical and research skills, cultivating and providing autonomy for making communication-related decisions on behalf of an organization, and reinforcing good ethical practice and solid professional values and norms in the 'real work for real clients' model.

To that end, the student-run agency is an excellent springboard that bears closer study in terms of best practices and as an outlet for fostering professionalism. Not all of the research areas addressed in this study translate directly to the aforementioned criteria for professionalism, but many do.

In recent studies (Bush et al., 2017; Haygood et al., 2019; Ranta et al., 2019), communication professionals have recommended academic programs provide pedagogical elements that mirror real-world practice whenever possible. The student-run agency (SRA) is an integrative learning experience which mimics the professional agency and provides exceptional instruction in applying soft and hard skills.

The Role of Student-Run Agencies in Emulating Professional Organizations

The goal of an SRA, in large part, is to create an environment students may find themselves in upon graduation in terms of deadlines, client management, client service, professional standards of work and promotion of competencies. There are various types of structures and specialties in contemporary SRAs (Bush et al., 2018). Some may be composed of a handful of students and a graduate assistant, others may be a stand-alone student club or an offshoot of a student organization like the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), and still others may be highly structured, repeatable classes worth between 1-3 credit hours engaging dozens of students per academic year.

Regardless of its structure, however, ultimately a student-run agency should strive to generate professionalism among its students by emulating professional, client-service behavior that reinforces their identity, reputation, and problem-solving acumen.

This study explored current SRA operations based on responses from more than 60 advisers in the United States, and illustrates best practices by the agencies and how they mirror professional agency operations. The questions focused on multiple areas including practice discipline integration, the scope of work (public relations, advertising, strategic communication, and integrated communication), client diversity, business development practices, personnel management and recruitment, agency identity and promotion, client selection, revenue generation, and facilities and technology usage and adoptions.

Advisers provided insights on their particular agency's perceived best practices, core competencies, client type, organizational structure, infrastructure, student leadership, funding and professional affiliation(s).

Implications for this study include pedagogical planning, integrative learning opportunities, establishment of generalized best practices and discussion of improved standards of performance to successfully prepare graduates for the communication professions.

Literature Review

Whether headed toward a career at an agency or within another type of similar organization, communication-related jobs require a level of understanding of required practices, skills development, establishment protocols and the confidence to complete tasks or provide counsel. Thus, this research is built on a dual theory approach: self-efficacy and professionalism.

Student-run agencies enable students to become more confident in their skills. Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy theory focuses on an individual's ability to believe they can produce positive results by completing tasks or activities based on learned skills sets. Learning occurs by observing; then the behavior(s) are reinforced and repeated (Schunk, 2012). These skills can include both hard and/or soft skills. In the case of communicators, sample hard skills involve knowledge or expertise such as writing, video production, event planning, etc.

Soft skills are also fostered in the SRA environment and include development of personal attributes such as collaboration, time management and interpersonal communication (Robles, 2012). In a recent study by Ranta et al. (2019) student-run agency participants said they had strong confidence to execute tasks associated with 23 separate communication-related variables and attributed much of that confidence to experience gained during time spent in their SRA. Students strongly agreed or agreed across 20 variables that their time in an SRA contributed to that confidence. Variables where students felt confidence and credited the SRA for creating it, included collaborative leadership, public relations principles, endurance and persistence in the face of adversity, persuasive communication, social media aptitude, brand communication planning, interpersonal communication, and advertising principles. Swanson (2019) recognized more measurable hard skill tasks such as client communication, social media management and campaign planning/development as areas where students perceived they had gained self-efficacy.

Equally important, Cruess (2006) argued that professionalism is a separate and equal learning experience within the context of other types of instruction. Though Cruess' research is focused on healthcare professionals and practitioners, the same can be argued for professionals and practitioners in communication disciplines. Rather than leaving the learning of professionalism to happenstance, Cruess posited that it should be specifically incorporated into curriculum. His position built on Freidson's (2001) work where he emphasized the occupational value and importance of professionalism as a distinctive aspect of work. More specifically, Cruess and Cruess (2012) argued professionalism must be taught both through a definition and a series of traits for theoretical knowledge and through role modeling and experiential learning. In those terms, SRAs are a gateway to providing a path toward learning professionalism in preparation for a real-world, post graduate job engagement.

Addressing professionalism within the PR, advertising, and integrated communication professions, Brunner et al. (2018) found a preponderance of professional position postings showed new graduates needed a mix of hard and soft skills including writing, time management, and collaboration. Krishna et al. (2019) also found a mix of hard and soft skills when surveying practitioners themselves. Swanson (2019) found that SRA graduates did identify time management and team collaboration among the top five skills they acquired.

To prepare communication students for positions in a highly-competitive job environment, an increasingly popular college/university experience addressing this need involves student-run agencies. According to Swanson (2017), there are more than 150 SRAs at colleges and universities in the U.S. Whether managed as an advertising, public relations, or integrated/strategic communication agency, SRAs prepare students for careers while still within an educational setting. Student-run agencies provide a link between academic course work and the professional world by providing opportunities to integrate skills learned in the classroom with real world experience working for real clients. (Huber & Hutchings, 2004; Swanson, 2011; Kim, 2015; Bush et al., 2018).

While traditional campaigns courses are often the capstones for communication-related programs, some argue they may provide a more hypothetical experience and less "real-world" simulation than student-run agencies (Haley et al., 2016). Many campaigns classes minimize client interaction and risk. Instead, as Bush (2009) asserted, SRAs often provide a better opportunity for experiential learning and professional abilities development through the incorporation of business practices, agency operations and other career-related skills seen as valuable by students, advisers and hiring managers. The agency structure adds a level of depth to the learning through day-to-day engagement, collaboration and problem-solving (Haygood et al., 2019).

In addition to confidence, the real-world aspect of student-run agencies is significant for multiple reasons. Academics and practitioners agree a key component of the educational experience should be co-curricular and include experiences such as SRAs. According to the most recent Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) report on undergraduate education, practitioners indicated experience in student-run media, student-run public relations firms, and public relations organizations are among the most "highly-desired traits" when hiring graduates because of the professional development opportunities these experiences provide (CPRE, 2018).

Professional and Student-Run Agency Parallels

In a 2014 study of chief communication and marketing officers, Weber Shandwick documented the growing trend of the integration of communication and marketing, in part to align with "an increasingly complex media environment" (p. 3). Likewise, the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (2019) reported that 90% of business leaders surveyed said that PR and marketing will become somewhat or a lot more integrated in the next five years. Nearly a decade ago, Bush and Miller (2011) found that 43% of advisors described their agencies as specifically PR or advertising agencies. At the same time, the lines between sources of media continue to blur. In the previously cited 2019 USC Annenberg study, 62% of business leaders agreed that there will be no distinction between paid, earned, shared, and owned (PESO) media in five years. Thus, supporting integration of advertising and public relations efforts is critical for most academic programs.

Like professional agencies, space is important. In 2011, Bush and Miller found that 38% of student-run agencies had dedicated office space, which led to higher learning outcomes. These spaces include student leadership offices, client and student conference rooms, and creative and production workspaces. Being in a professional environment also includes the need for business acumen. Ragas et al., (2015) found that senior communication executives want to hire those that understand the business of agencies and the businesses of the clients.

Student Experience in the Agency

In two studies (Bush et al., 2017 and Haygood et al., 2019), SRA graduates and hiring decision makers outlined the importance of working with a diversity of people, as well as understanding return on investment to prepare graduates for the field. Also, recent literature has outlined the need to prepare students for leadership roles in the field, particularly in light of dynamic changes in the industry (Pavlik, 2013; Bronstein & Fitzpatrick, 2015). In addition, paying students for their time shows the importance of and difference in the work from traditional academic environments and motivates them to fully engage in the work, much like professional communicators. Payment is also ethical if the agency charges clients. The Public Relations Society of America's (2011) Professional Standards Advisory advocates for paid internships when students create billable work.

And while writing led the list of most desired hard skills among many researchers, listening and creativity were among the top soft skills many new practitioners should have. As pointed out in Ranta et al., (2019), and in a recent 2020 AEJMC professional panel (Davis et al., 2020), SRAs are instructive areas for a variety of hard and soft skills from writing, web design, video production, and social media execution to soft skills like collaborative leadership, time management, collegiality, relationship-building, persistence in the face of adversity and providing ethical communication counsel.

In addition, the skills and experiences gained from participating in a student-run agency can also make a difference in graduates competing for entry-level positions (Haygood et al., 2019). In interviews with advertising agency hiring decision-makers, among the most valued perceived benefits of SRAs were real client interaction, communicating, and collaborating with a diversity of people, understanding agency operations/culture, being held accountable for project completion, and experiencing the rigors of agency life. "Several respondents asserted that the experience could even rival actual internships because of the direct client interaction gained at student agencies and the real accountability of the work generated," (p. 31).

These results are consistent with previous research about the benefits of student-run agencies. Bush and Miller (2011) found that agency advisers believed students gain experiences in applied skills and professionalism. More specifically, Maben and Whitson (2014) found that advisers felt students matured, became more confident, more responsible, and were better teammates while also becoming better at problem-solving and leadership through experience in an SRA.

From a recent graduate perspective, those with SRA experience now working in the professional communication fields most highly valued the real-world client interactions, agency operations experience, communicating with a diversity of people, and gaining professional skills provided via the SRA (Bush et al., 2017). Similarly, Haley et al., (2016) found students appreciated the "real-life" aspect of SRAs to increase their personal job marketability while building soft skills such as collaboration, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and leadership.

In order for students to learn hard and soft skills, professionalism and self-efficacy, hiring decision makers recommend that SRAs mimic professional agencies as much as possible in both their structures and processes (Haygood et al., 2019). In 2009, Bush posited that students participating in highly structured SRAs (specific job titles, competitive applications processes, formal assessment practices, dedicated office space, etc.) were more likely to achieve greater learning outcomes. These levels of learning included applying PR theories to real-world clients, learning business processes and protocols, and developing a professional identity. Likewise, Bush and Miller (2011) found that SRAs with dedicated office space reported significantly higher levels of learning in these areas than SRAs without dedicated spaces. Therefore, it is imperative to review the nuances of a professional agency environment and how SRAs mimic this integrative learning immersion.

Methodology

When analyzing the professional agency organizational environment through native experience and studies of agency descriptions

(Wynne, 2013; Juneja 2015), several categories of operations are specific to a professional communications agency (public relations, advertising, integrated communication, etc.) and in some cases, are unique to that career pursuit.

For the purpose of this research those elements are: establishing a purpose and people required to complete the agency mission; investing in and "hiring" those with professional qualifications; establishing a process for employee recruitment and retention; establishing a policy for client recruitment and service; ensuring systems in place for revenue generation; and stewardship of resources (Swanson, 2017; Bush et al., 2018).

Keeping those professional agency functions, traits and responsibilities in mind, this study of SRA operations investigated areas where integrated learning opportunities at the BA/BS level replicated those variables in preparing students for professional work in the agency environment.

This study includes responses from 64 SRA faculty adviser respondents, out of a total of 164 distinct points of contact who were asked about the organization and orientation of their particular student-run agency. Advisers were contacted via e-mail and invited to use a link to a Qualtrics survey. Advisers were queried over a three-week period with multiple, scheduled e-mails sent asking recipients to respond and reminding them to do so. The list of recipients was assembled from various sources including registration in the 2016 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) international conference directory, personal contacts from the study authors, other scholars studying student-run agencies, research databases of other SRA advisers and Internet searches of student-run agency and university web sites.

The survey included 47 questions centered around the following areas:

- Details about the agency (including name/branding, affiliated university, and characterization of the agency as a club or a class)
- Type of agency (PR, integrated communication, strategic communication, advertising, other)
- Agency core competencies
- Client types served by the agency (for profit, not-for-profit, university properties, NGOs, etc.)
- Annual number of student participants
- Recruitment/selection of students
- Organizational structure of the agency
- Fee structures (if any) for the agency (clients are charged, not charged for work performed, etc.)
- Employment characterization of the agency workers (student workers paid or unpaid, graduate assistants, teaching assistants, etc.)
- Funding sources for the agency (grants, profits, endowments, etc.)
- Agency resources (dedicated space, dedicated equipment, levels of technology, etc.)
- Sources of clients to the agency (recruited, referred, etc.)
- Other observations SRA advisers may have had about their particular firm.

Where appropriate, free response answers were permitted in an attempt to obtain elaboration of specific variables.

Results

To illustrate how an SRA can successfully mimic a professional firm, there are some clear distinctions included in the tabulations. The following categories were provided to better organize the responses: Adviser Descriptions of their Specific SRA—people and purpose; SRAs and Professional Qualifications; Recruiting Students; “Employee” Compensation/Retention; Client Recruitment; SRA Revenue Generation; SRA Funding and Grants; and Stewardship of/Access to Resources.

Survey results were tabulated and expressed in percentages of the total number of respondents.

> *Important notation: many of the questions discussed in this study involved multiple selection questions. Therefore, while there was only a maximum total of 64 respondents in the survey, some questions delivered three-figure response results. These results are reported as percentages of the total number of responses, not respondents. In addition, because of the relatively small sample size, and because this was a descriptive study, a more robust statistical analysis was not conducted.*

Resources, in terms of hard costs or their representations are very important components if an agency is to be deemed successful. In this research, the line of questioning revolves around space, technology and operating revenue.

Another important definition of a professional firm is the quantity and type of services it provides. This survey explored the different types of core competencies the SRAs offered based on similar capabilities seen in the professional realm of agency work.

In addition to a clear path of core competencies, many professional agencies define themselves by the types of clients they serve or specialize in. There are any variety of types of clients an SRA could specialize in or work towards. An active line of questioning in this survey addressed types of clients served by each SRA.

Another area where professional firms define themselves is the scope, breadth and depth of the employees who work for them. The SRA has similar challenges. There are several questions in the survey addressing selection of individuals to work in the SRA and the questions of compensation for who works within the organization.

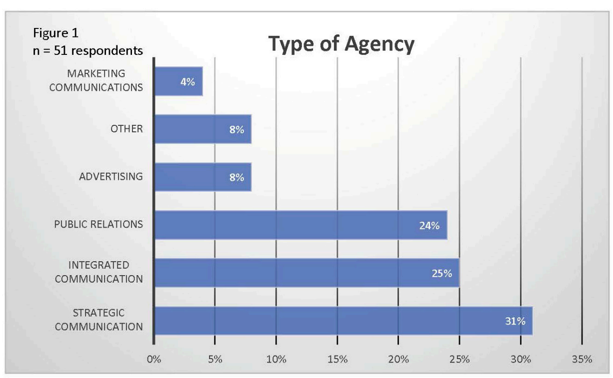
Adviser Descriptions of their Specific SRA—People and Purpose

In terms of people who staffed and managed the SRA, advisers offered several insights in response to a variety of questions. Characterizing the size of SRAs, a total of 49 respondents said their SRA sizes in terms of students ranged from 21% having 60 + students participating to 14% having 0-9 students participating annually. Other breakouts of attendance were spread out between 19% having 10-19 students participating annually, 19% of respondents having 20-29 students participating annually and nine percent having 50-59 or 40-49 student participants annually.

When asked how to describe their agencies by primary capabilities (core competencies) a total of 51 advisers responded. Thirty-one percent of respondents said their firm was a strategic communications agency, 25% said their firm was an integrated communication agency and 24% said their firm was primarily a public relations agency. Other choices recorded included an advertising agency, a marketing communications agency and "other." Figure 1 shows a detailed breakout of all choices.

Figure 1

Type of Agency



Among the other respondents, one adviser indicated they were called public relations but were really an integrated communication agency, one respondent said their agency was a creative services agency, another claimed to be a digital and social media agency, and one outlier said their SRA was a gift-product provider.

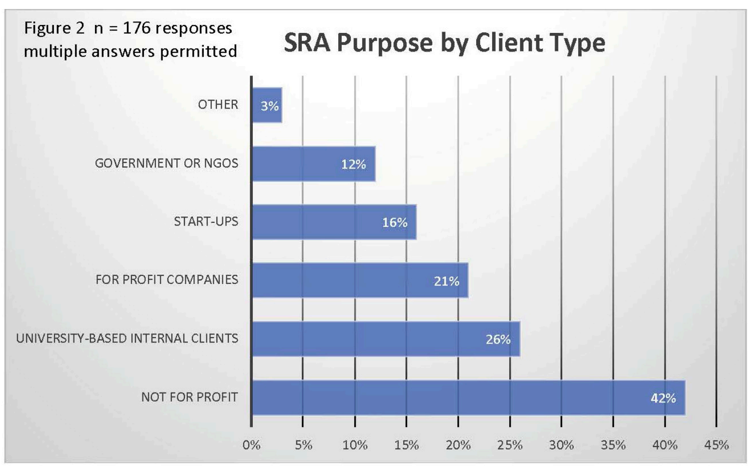
When describing core competencies via a free-response question, SRA advisers reflected a converged media population with wide varieties of professional categories including public relations research, strategy, objectives and tactics. Creation and distribution of press materials and branded materials were also mentioned. Some advisers said their firms engaged in event planning and execution. Analytics were also prominent responses with firms claiming social media content analysis and execution competencies; digital media content design and analytics competencies and digital media strategies and analytics. Other SRA advisers claimed competencies in advertising functions to include research, design and tactics, including branding. Some firms said they exclusively specialized in all things required for not-for-profits. Still more claimed graphic design, web design, experiential marketing design, and video production as their strengths. Most notable about the volume and quality of responses was the assertion that agencies vary in their competencies but many were self-described as integrated or strategic or converged in their competency claims and approaches. See Appendix 1 for more details.

Specific free-response comments regarding the questions of mission/core values yielded a wide selection of answers: One respondent summed up their SRA mission: "…to provide clients with comprehensive PR strategies and solutions, to offer (university name) Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) members the opportunity to apply their knowledge and gain experience beyond the classroom, and to build credibility while forming lasting student-client relationships." Another respondent said, "Provide strategic communication services to external and internal clients. Serve the community without undermining the established, for-profit firms." Another said their SRA was "Full service with significant expertise in social media (content and analysis) and engagement with millennials." See Appendix 2 for more details.

Similarly when defining the purpose of the SRA by client type, from an unknown number of respondents, within 176 responses (multiple client categories permitted), 42% of the answers indicated their SRA served not-for-profit organizations, 26% said their SRA served university-based internal clients, 21% indicated their firms served for profit companies, 16% of responses indicated their firm served start-ups, 12% said their SRA served government or NGOs; and three percent of respondents said other. Figure 2 has more detail.

Figure 2

SRA Purpose by Client Type



Of those selecting other, one respondent said they were a service bureau for an outside agency, another stressed they only served "501(c)(3) compliant organizations" and one more said they were "supporting commercial agencies with research and work."

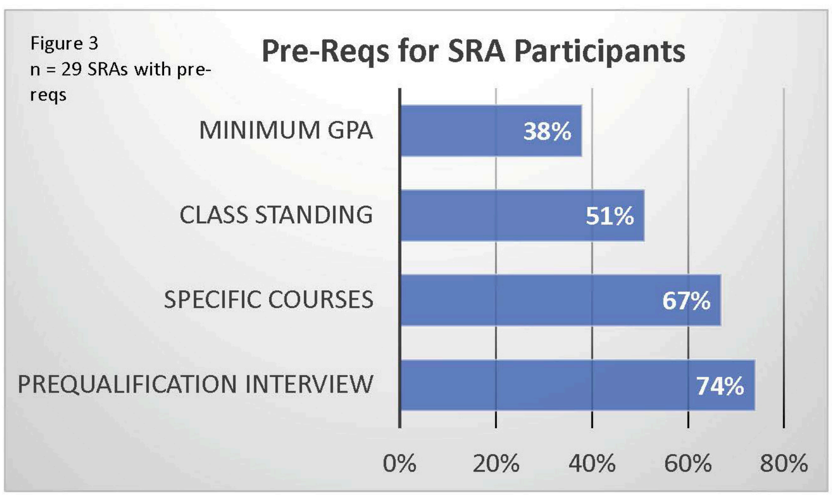
SRAs and Professional Qualifications

Much like professional agencies, SRAs also have identified a need to ensure qualified people are "hired" for work in their agencies. Addressing the need for pre-qualifications/pre-requisites for taking the SRA course, among 48 respondents, 60% indicated their SRA had pre-requisites for student participation and 40% indicated they did not.

Among the categories of those SRAs requiring pre-requisites, (29 respondents), 38% included a minimum GPA, 51% cited specific class standing as a participation requirement and 67% required specific courses prior to SRA participation. In addition, 74% of advisers indicated they performed a pre-qualification interview prior to permitting students to enroll in the class. Twenty-six percent did not. See Figure 3 for more details.

Figure 3

Type of Pre-Reqs for SRA Student Participants



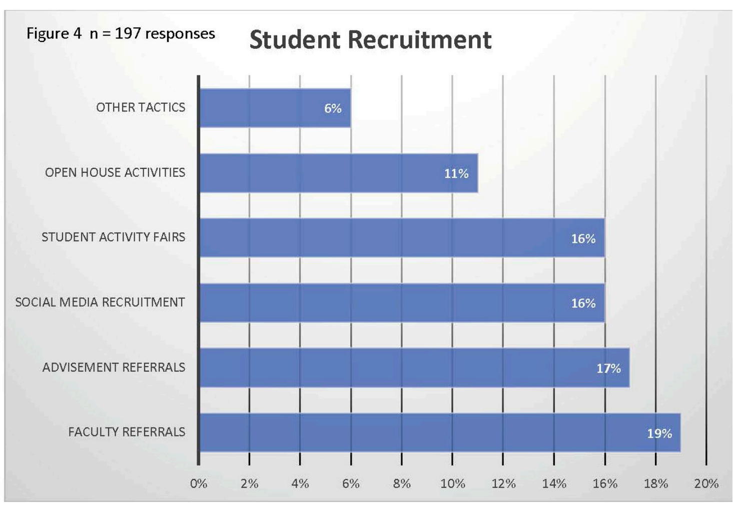
Further addressing preparation of students to participate in an SRA, of 48 respondents, 54% indicated their agency was taught as a class, and 46% indicated their agency was not. Within the universe of those using a class model for their SRA experience, 19 respondents indicated that it was an elective class and only 4 SRA advisers said their class was required for their program of study.

Recruiting Students

As it pertained to recruiting students to work for the SRA, advisers indicate a large selection of tactics with many agencies employing a robust approach. In this question, multiple answers were accepted. Of 197 responses, 19% of student recruitment efforts involved the use of faculty referrals, 17% used advisement referrals to 16% involved student activity fairs, 16% involved social media, 11% included open house activities and six percent used other tactics including: classroom visits, student presentations to classes, utilization of entrepreneurship programs, PRSSA chapter meetings, student orientations and electronic bulletin boards. See Figure 4 for more details.

Figure 4

Student Recruitment



Another important tool for recruiting students to work at the SRA, is a digital location to display the student experience and showcase student work. Students use this outlet in marketing themselves for jobs as they matriculate. Among the 46 respondents to the question of website presence to showcase student work, 59% of advisers said that they use an agency web site or some other digital identity to show the student experience and/or highlight student work. Forty-one percent did not create/use a web site for displaying the student experience/student work.

"Employee" Compensation/Retention

As with a professional agency environment, in addition to recruiting employees/participants, there is also a need for SRAs to retain students. Among a field of 47 SRA adviser respondents, 43% indicated they did pay some of their student workers for work done at the firm, 57% did not. In a separate but related question, among 24 respondents who indicated they did pay students for working at the firm, two percent said they offered incentive pay, 50% offered leadership pay, 12% said they offered merit pay for exceptional performance, and 58% indicated they had other paid position structures including graphic design work, business manager work, compensation for PRSSA participation, and summer internships, which they considered compensation for student work.

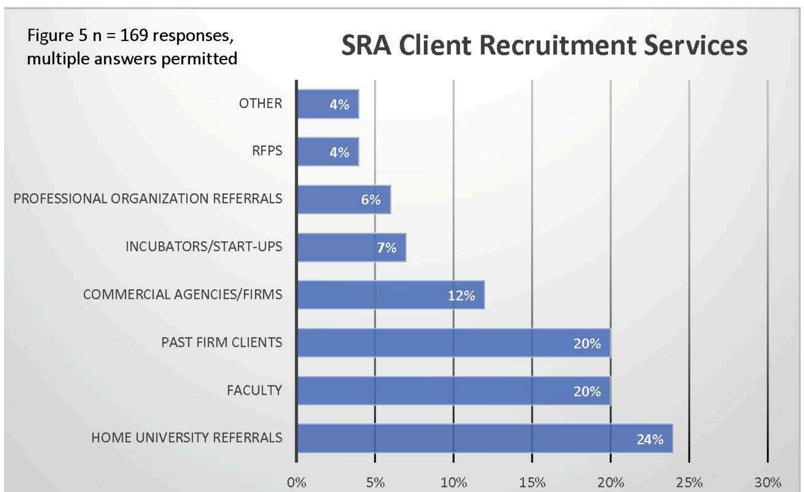
Client Recruitment

Another key function of agency work in both the professional and student-run agency environment includes recruiting clients for the firm. Respondents indicated a broad selection of strategies to gain clients. Of the 169 responses, (respondents could select multiple strategies), 24% involved receiving referrals from their home university, 20% involved recruitment of clients by faculty, 20% involved referrals from past firm clients, 12% involved referrals from commercial agencies or firms, eight percent involved supporting business incubators or start-ups and six percent involved receiving referrals from professional organizations like the American Advertising Federation, The Public Relations Society of America, or the International Association of Business Communicators or other referral sources. Four percent involved pursuing competitive bids or RFP responses, or other strategies including student recruitment of clients, direct sales from student teams, and alumni assistance. See Figure 5 for more details.

One key component of a professional agency's business development strategy is displaying/discussing past client work. This is no different with SRAs. Potential clients who are thinking about hiring an agency usually want to see what caliber of work has been previously accomplished. This vetting of agencies via their work usually involves some sort of digital display of work like a web site, a blog page or other forms of digital media. When asked about displaying client work for recruiting clients, of 47 SRA adviser respondents, 66% indicated they had a web site for displaying client work, 34% said they did not.

Figure 5

Client Recruitment Sources



SRA Revenue Generation

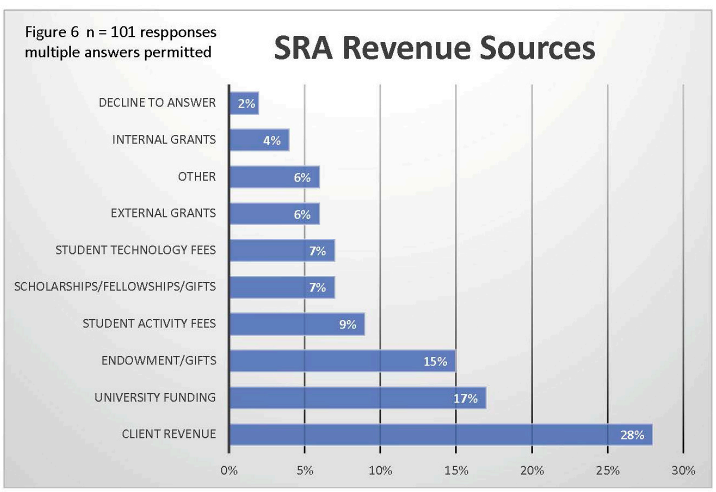
Another important part of an agency business model is revenue generation. Not as critical for a state or privately funded institution when contrasted with a professional agency, charging fees for client work can nonetheless be instructive in terms of teaching budgeting, billing requirements and valuing levels of service. Of 47 SRA adviser respondents, 28% said they had no paying clients, 13% of respondents said one percent to 25% of their clients paid for student work. Eleven percent of advisers said 26% - 49% of their clients paid for their students' work. Thirteen percent said 50% -74% of their student work went to paying clients and 36% of advisers said 75% -100% of their SRA clients were paying clients.

SRA Funding and Grants

In terms of funding the student-run agency, there were many sources of revenue reported. Among the 101 responses addressing funding sources, (respondents could select more than one funding source), 15% of the responses indicated endowments or gifts as a fund source. Twenty-eight percent of responses identified client revenue as a funding source. Nine percent indicated student activity fees as a funding source. Seven percent of responses indicated student technology fees as a funding source. Seven percent of responses indicated development monies to include scholarships or fellowships as well as gifts as a funding source. Seventeen percent indicated university funding as a revenue source. Six percent indicated external grants as a funding source. Four percent indicated internal grants as a funding source. Two percent preferred not to say, and six percent indicated other sources including donations, course fees, student fees, and alumni donations. See Figure 6 for more information.

Figure 6

SRA Revenue Source



Stewardship and Access to Resources

In addition to purpose, people, expertise, clients, revenue and operational funds, professional and student-run agencies need resources. This research showed that of 47 survey respondents, 72% indicated they had dedicated space to house the firm, 28% indicated they did not. In a separate question, of 38 SRA adviser respondents, 95% indicated they had facilities primarily located on their campus and five percent indicated they were off campus.

Similarly, defining specific space usage by the different SRAs within a collection of 131 responses (respondents were allowed to select more than one space use strategy) 17% of adviser responses indicated they had a dedicated student conference room, 17% indicated a client conference room, 15% indicated creative workspaces for video/audio display, 14% included dedicated faculty offices, 12% indicated dedicated student leadership offices, 12% indicated student work display areas and 10% indicated dedicated classrooms for teaching. Three percent of responses indicated other facilities including a social media listening center, breakout rooms for student work, and multi-function rooms. See Appendix 3 for more details.

In terms of technology for client work, the survey asked about both dedicated technology that resided with the SRA and shared technology. As it pertains to technology spaces, among 47 SRA adviser responses, 53% indicated dedicated technology spaces for client work and 47% indicated they did not have those dedicated spaces.

In a total of 113 responses, (respondents were allowed to select multiple technology types) SRA advisers indicated a wide selection of dedicated technology advantages. Seventeen percent had graphic design facilities, 12% of responses indicated either dedicated survey software or social media software, 10% had dedicated video production facilities. Eight percent had dedicated high quality/high resolution printing, dedicated portable lighting kits or dedicated server space for hosting client web sites. Six percent had dedicated audio production facilities, and four percent or less had dedicated focus group facilities, photo or still photography studios, video recording studios, 3D/animation software, media relations software. or event hosting materials. See Appendix 4 for more details.

In terms of shared technologies, out of 212 responses (SRA advisers were allowed to list multiple technologies), 12% had shared video recording studios or shared video production facilities, 11% had shared audio production facilities, 10% had shared focus group recording facilities. Nine percent had shared portable video and light kits, shared survey software, shared photo or still photography studios. Eight percent had shared graphic design facilities. Six percent had access to high quality/high resolution printing. Three percent or less of SRAs had shared server space for hosting client materials, shared media relations software, shared social media monitoring software or a shared MAC lab. See Appendix 5 for more details.

Implications/Recommendations

The SRA is a growing phenomenon among universities in the United States. Imitating the model of a professional agency for students to experience is a strong contribution to the application of theory, increased confidence and student retention. By providing a ‘real work for real clients’ environment, students gain confidence, real world application of learned knowledge and in many cases, valuable network experience that translates directly to increased chances of employability. SRA advisers are offering a diverse selection of opportunities to imitate the professional environment while maintaining some level of control, qualification and results within their organizations.

Specific results of this survey do not point to a “one size fits all” pedagogy or methodology that advisers can implement, but rather a collection of outcomes and expectations that can be implemented to ensure students have a constructive and productive experience. However, based on this research, areas where SRAs mirror current and future trends in PR communications include:

1. Establishing a purpose for the SRA and defining it by core competencies and client type—much like a professional agency.
2. Establishing a level/structure of the SRA organization and the number of students required to complete the organization's mission—much like a professional agency. Solutions include dedicated classes, clubs and other organizational structures.
3. Determination of how to "hire" and invest in those with professional qualifications—much like a professional agency and determining how knowledge/investment will be delivered including paid or unpaid leadership staff, interviewing student participants, establishing academic prerequisites, etc.
4. Establishing a process for employee retention with various benefit structures—mimicking the professional agency process, and including for some, monetary compensation and for others extra, career-enhancing responsibilities, paid dues, conference travel etc.
5. Establishing a policy for client recruitment—much like a professional agency and service including utilizing a wide variety of tactics to find clients.
6. Ensuring systems are established and in place for revenue generation/operating expenses—similar to a professional agency business model.
7. Establishing a system for obtaining resources necessary for agency operations including dedicated workspaces, dedicated or shared technologies and stewardship of those resources for use in client service and student training—reflecting concerns by professional agencies to remain relevant and current.

Specific points to consider from the results of this survey include:

1. *Integration*: A majority of SRAs identify as integrated agencies. Among respondents, 32% said their agencies were specifically focused on either PR or advertising, while 56% identified themselves as integrated communications agencies or strategic communications agencies. In comparison, in Bush and Miller's study (2011), 43% of advisors described their agencies as specifically PR or advertising agencies in 2011. This growth in integration aligns with research from the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (2019).
2. *Agency capabilities*: Along with integration comes the need to expand agency services to include a variety of communications strategies and tactics, as well as capabilities that focus on increased technology and data analytics. This study shows among the various SRAs, clients can engage with some or all elements of the full strategic process – from research and concepting to execution and measurement. Agencies reported doing work that includes research and strategic planning, analytics and trend analysis, creative concepting, writing, design, social media, event planning, media relations, etc.
3. *Diversity of clients and people:* This study shows that SRAs are currently exposing students to a mix of revenue positive and pro bono agency clients, government clients, NGO's, on-campus clients and start-ups. Only 28% of SRAs in this study reported having no paying clients, while 49% said more than half of their clients are paying clients. Having a mix of both for-profit and nonprofit clients gives students the opportunity to work with a broad representation of industry professionals while teaching them the importance of the ever-present return on investment. As previous studies have indicated (Bush et al., 2017; Haygood et al., 2019), SRAs need to continue doing more to introduce students to industry billing and budgeting practices.
4. *Competitive application process and pre-requisites:* The majority

of SRAs in this study interview students prior to selection. While some SRAs are taught as elective courses, many student agencies require students have basic knowledge of theory and concepts before participating in the agency. This gives them the opportunity to apply what they learn in the classroom to their SRA work, while also practicing how to professionally present themselves in a competitive interview process.

5. *Client recruitment*. While the majority of student agencies obtain clients through active recruitment by faculty or referrals from professional agencies and previous clients, at least some student agencies are participating in competitive RFP processes. Eight agencies said they participate in RFP processes, and several agencies said students participate in active new business development. Maintaining a pipeline of viable clients and participating in new business pitches is a foundation of success for professional agencies. SRAs may want to do more to expose students to these practices.

6. *Paid leadership opportunities.* While the majority of students are not paid for their time in the student agency, about 43% of students are paid for some of their work, particularly when it comes to leadership roles such as business manager, agency director, and finance officer. This also aligns with the literature on preparing future practitioners for leadership roles (Pavlik, 2013; Bronstein and Fitzpatrick, 2015). It also incorporates professionalism (Cruess and Cruess, 2012) and is ethically important for agencies that bill clients (PRSA, 2011).

7. *Dedicated office space and technology.* Just like professional agencies, the majority of agencies (72%) have some kind of dedicated (solo or shared) office space for agency functions. In addition, over half of student agencies have dedicated technology spaces for student work. In comparison, this is a vast improvement over the 38% reporting having a dedicated office space in 2011 (Bush & Miller,

2011). Student agencies are using many of the technologies found in professional agencies, including audio and visual production facilities, software for research and social media monitoring, graphic design facilities and software, and focus group facilities.

8. *Agency Branding.* When it comes to agency branding, 59% of agencies indicated they had a website to display their work, while 41% did not. Promoting SRA work is critical for two reasons. First, students benefit from the exposure when interviewing for internships and jobs. Secondly, it promotes the existence of SRAs to potential clients and communications professionals. This is particularly important given that a recent study showed a low level of awareness of SRAs among hiring decision makers (Haygood et al., 2019). SRAs would do well to develop professional websites, keep them updated, and explore other opportunities for continuous agency branding through blogs, podcasts and social media pages.

9. *Size does matter, for a lot of things.* Larger agencies in terms of participating students translated into more client revenue being used to offset expenses, more dedicated or shared spaces of various types and more flexibility in recruiting of students and clients using an open house approach.

Conclusions and Future Research

This study is a broad survey of SRA operations and reveals that there are many faculty advisers working to establish professional-level SRA experiences resulting in superior training and qualification of students via this integrative learning opportunity.

Further research in these areas would include "drilling down" into specific practices within SRAs that could shed insight on best strategies for client recruitment, student recruitment, student retention, client retention, resource acquisition, etc.

Another interesting area of study would be to explore the experience, qualifications and agency aspirations of the SRA advisers themselves. What visions do these individuals have for the growth of their agencies and what qualifications do they have to lead the agencies? And, as this is a unique study that focuses on the material and pragmatic aspects of establishing and running an SRA, this might be an interesting study that could be used as a baseline to track changes and improvements to the SRA model as more universities experiment with this integrative learning model.

Finally, as alluded to in the earlier Haygood et al., (2019) study there may be other strategies SRAs can employ to make professional agencies more aware of the student-run agency and its exceptional training of new graduates—filling the need for trained professionals in the fields of public relations, advertising, integrated communication and strategic communication.

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Appendix 1—SRA Core Competencies, Free Response

- Creation and distribution of press materials and branded materials
- Event planning and execution
- Social media content analysis and execution
- Digital media content design
- Digital media strategies and analytics
- Advertising research, design and tactics, including branding
- Not-for-profits
- Graphic design
- Web design
- Experiential marketing design
- Video production

Appendix 2—SRA Core Mission and Values, Free Response

- "…to provide clients with comprehensive PR strategies and solutions, to offer (university name) Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) members the opportunity to apply their knowledge and gain experience beyond the classroom, and to build credibility while forming lasting student-client relationships."
- "Provide strategic communication services to external and internal clients. Serve the community without undermining the established, for-profit firms."
- "Full service with significant expertise in social media (content and analysis) and engagement with millennials."
- "General advertising services for community groups, not for profits and university-related clients. An emphasis on NFPs in the community."

Appendix 3—Access to Dedicated Resource Spaces

(N = 131 with multiple responses possible)

• Seventeen percent indicated a client conference room
• Seventeen percent of adviser responses indicated dedicated student conference room
• Fifteen percent indicated creative workspaces for video/audio display
• Fourteen percent included dedicated faculty offices
• Twelve percent indicated dedicated student leadership offices
• Twelve percent indicated student work display areas
• Ten percent indicated dedicated classrooms for teaching
• Three percent of responses indicated other facilities including a social media listening center, breakout rooms, for student work, and multi-function rooms

Appendix 4—Access to Dedicated Technology

(N = 113 with multiple responses possible)

- Seventeen percent had graphic design facilities
- Twelve percent had survey software
- Twelve percent had social media software
- Ten percent had dedicated video production facilities
- Eight percent had portable lighting kits
- Eight percent had dedicated high quality/high resolution printing
- Eight percent had server space for hosting client web sites
- Six percent had dedicated audio production facilities
- Four percent had dedicated media relations software
- Four percent had focus group facilities
- Four percent had photo or still photography studios
- Four percent had video recording studios
- Four percent had 3D/animation software
- Two percent had other dedicated technologies described as event hosting materials.

Appendix 5—Access to Shared Technology

(N = 212 with multiple responses possible)

- Twelve percent had shared video production facilities
- Twelve percent had shared video recording studios
- Eleven percent had shared audio production facilities
- Ten percent had shared focus group recording facilities
- Nine percent had shared portable video and light kits
- Nine percent had shared survey software
- Nine percent had shared photo or still photography studios
- Eight percent had shared graphic design facilities
- Six percent had access to high quality/high resolution printing;
- Three percent had social media monitoring software
- Three percent had shared server space for hosting client materials
- One percent said they had a shared MAC lab
- Two (<one percent) SRAs reported shared media relations software

Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 142-170

Reconstructing the PR History Time Machine: Missing Women and People of Color in Introductory Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study offers a critical perspective on reasons for and effects of missing women and people of color across introductory public relations textbooks' history pages, leading instructors to supplement public relations history lessons with their own pedagogical materials. Viewing survey findings of public relations instructors through feminist and critical race theory (CRT) lenses yields three important recommendations for moving beyond a great *Caucasian/White* men benchmark, corporate settings, and U.S.-centric 20th century context in order to more appropriately include women and people of color in recorded public relations history.

Keywords: public relations textbooks, critical race theory, feminist theory, people of color, women

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted October 11, 2020. Revisions submitted January 18, 2021, and February 21, 2021. Manuscript accepted for publication March 3, 2021. First published online September 2021.

Even though Caucasian/White men continue to dominate U.S. e-suites, the public relations practice among entry- and mid-levels widely has been acknowledged as a feminized field since the 1980s (Cline, et al., 1986). Today, about 72% of public relations professionals are women (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2019) and more than 70% of public relations students in the U.S. are women (U.S., 2018). While the number of people of color practicing public relations in the U.S. remains low, demographic shifts in the U.S. and ongoing civil rights protests in the form of the #Black Lives Matter movement increasingly demand diverse perspectives among communication professionals. People around the world in 2020 lead protest marches for justice and greater opportunities for people of color. The time is right, now, for public relations history to be examined for its representations of women and people of color.

A quick glance through pages of the most popular public relations history chapters reveals token attention to women and people of color. Doris E. Fleishman, for example, is framed simply as the "wife and business partner" of Edward Bernays as they worked together at their firm (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 91). Public relations historian Lamme (2015) argued for expansion of public relations history pages, suggesting that perhaps one reason why figures like Ivy Ledbetter Lee and Bernays have been dually crowned as 'fathers' of public relations is that they were skilled at shaping and promoting their own legacy. Instead, Lamme (2015) recommended a broader "analysis of [those] to whom we turn for precedents, inspiration and wisdom" (p. 52). Other researchers have argued for an expansion of corporate public relations history as a means to incorporate activities of certain demographic groups as well as grassroots, political, nonprofit, and educational practice sectors (e.g., Myers, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to offer a critical perspective on marginalization of women and people of color among history pages in introductory public relations textbooks. For decades, formal chronicling of public relations has begun with the 20th century work of Caucasian/White males whose paths were steeped in contexts of capitalism, corporations, and mass media. Benchmarking this time period and corporate settings as a beginning for public relations narrowly limits the types of historical figures represented as predominantly Caucasian/White, male, New York-based, college educated, and on the higher end of socio-economic status. Even J. E. Grunig criticized traditional public relations historiography as being Caucasian/White- and male-dominated (Bentele, 2015). We use feminist and critical race theories to problematize missing women and people of color among our introductory textbooks as potentially resulting from a combination of a narrow definition of *public relations*, the traditional 20th century timeline for chronicling the beginning of professional public relations as a phenomenon of the public sphere, an inability to move beyond J. E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four evolutionary models' progress orientation, and perhaps bias against women and people of color. We offer recommendations for remedying stasis in achieving authentic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in PR history telling.

Literature Review

Among recent findings of the Commission on Public Relations Education survey of public relations practitioners and educators is a proclamation that public relations history knowledge is "valuable because it provides context and a solid understanding of how public relations has evolved" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018, p. 28). Among survey respondents, 16% of practitioners who hire entry level public relations staff *strongly agree* and 32% *somewhat agree* that undergraduates' education should include "understanding the history of public relations so as to provide context and explain how public relations has evolved" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018, p. 30). Given that ours is a feminized field and bound by an ethics code to embrace DEI, it seems logical then that all students must be exposed to diverse contributions to its development (Pompper, 2004) and the chronicling of history of our field. Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) promotes a goal of "working toward a more diverse profession" with a diversity and inclusion committee and other initiatives (Diversity & Inclusion, n.d.) Effects of women and underrepresented culture/ethnic/racial groups' inability to *see someone like me* employed in certain fields/industries across all job levels, or represented in books, have been widely noted and offered as critique of ways Caucasian/White management persists and is promoted as some old-fashioned benchmark "neutral one-size-fits-all" perspective (Broughton, 2019, p. 1).

Borrowed from the organizational communication literature to better understand this mindset is the concept of homophily, explained by self-categorization theory. Homophily posits that people define themselves and others by using demographic categories (Turner & Oakes, 1986) – and the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971) suggests that people seek to reduce potential conflict in relationships by gravitating toward people similar to themselves (Sharif, 1958). Ultimately, the kinds of work environments yielded by this dynamic generally are unwelcoming of management applicants who do not fit the Caucasian/White male template. Because those who first began writing about public relations history were Caucasian/White and predominantly male, we argue that this way of thinking spilled over into the chronicling of professional public relations history as beginning in 20th century corporations and agencies who work for them according to the work of three Caucasian/White men – Ed Bernays, Ivy Lee, and P.T. Barnum. Comparatively, the number of women and people of color mentioned in formal public relations history are very few, indeed.

This review of literature unfolds in four parts, concluding with three research questions: 1) "Evolution" models, homophily, and corporations; 2) Theorizing secondary status and margins; 3) Feminist and critical race theory lenses; and 4) Textbooks and stasis.

"Evolution" Models, Homophily, and Corporations

Early theory building in public relations scholarship and ways the profession has been defined may have inadvertently limited ways we think of public relations history in terms of who belongs and who does not. In a recent *Journal of Public Relations Education* report, DiStaso (2019) referred to history books as pinpointing public relations history's beginning in the early 20th century. The J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) four models paradigm undergirds much of the way public relations history is told. It has been perpetuated in U.S.-based PR textbooks based on Bernays' public relations development framing which promotes his contributions (Hoy et al., 2007). For many years, U.S. public relations scholars tended to build on this standard by positioning public relations as a profession that has progressed over time and become increasingly sophisticated and ethical in the process (e.g., Gower, 2006, 2007). This linear model suggests that professional public relations techniques emerged following a period of press agentry when corporations needed to tell their side of the story following muckrakers' newspaper and magazine exposés about negative effects of industrial and commercial expansion. Lamme and Russell's (2010) monograph breaks from a "dependence on linear interpretations" (p. 281) of public relations' past by incorporating examples of persuasion techniques used in public relations over the course of 2000 years. Similarly, others have written that public relations' stages of manipulation, information, and then mutual influence/understanding have co-existed all along (e.g., Aronoff & Baskin, 1983).

Consequently, this study responds to Watson's (2014) invitation to public relations historians to be "more challenging than they are" (p. 274). So, we seek to investigate effects of published introduction to public relations textbook chapters by examining public relations instructors' perceptions of what they do to help their students learn public relations history. McKie and Xiafra (2014) similarly advocated for examining "PR pasts" (p. 669) in contemporary ways according to environmental context, nation-centric mindsets that interplay with archival assumptions and changing media impact, as well as scale-methods-ecological inclusiveness to encourage "fashioners of PR history" (p. 672) to incorporate nations' colonial past. Because we concur with L'Etang (2014b) that the process of doing public relations history work must involve considerations of "agency, structures, power, hegemony, ideology and communicative action" (p. 659), we chose to do more than simply examine introduction to public relations texts by asking instructors to share their perceptions about using them.

Even though experts vary as to when, where, or how public relations first began, PRSA and many U.S.-based researchers have adapted to the simplicity of J. E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models for establishing public relations development. Benchmarking of professional public relations' beginning as primarily a U.S.-based 20th century phenomenon is established in a popular public relations history book (Cutlip, 1995), public relations textbooks, and practitioners' speeches, memoirs, and obituaries (Fitch, 2016). Associating professional public relations history's beginning with the 20th century may have seemed to make sense in 1984, but as a consequence, informal aspects of public relations work taking place outside of corporations – like community building (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) – largely have been excluded. Public relations history, according to a U.S. perspective, favors corporate contexts (L'Etang, 2014a; Miller, 2000) and this, too, has offered limited benchmarks for telling stories about public relations history. Emphasis on corporations has played out in biases against women and people of color who were not part of management decision making there. Consequently both groups have been virtually ignored in public relations history, save a few tokens. Feminist theorists and CRT scholars remind us that in the early 1900s, most women still operated among the domestic, private sphere and people of color received little to no appreciation as leaders in business or otherwise (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tong, 2009). Both groups fall outside public relations' four evolutionary models' progress orientation and mostly have been excluded in how we tell our history. Also, attributing the U.S. with fostering the origins and development of professional public relations in the 20th century has translated to excluding non-U.S. perspectives on the history of the professional public relations field.

Alternately, the public relations five-stage development model offers space for qualifying public relations' development in terms of *foundations*, expansion, institutionalization, maturation, and professionalization (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001, p. 321). This model avoids framing public relations in terms of anyone's idea of progress. For the purpose of this study, Vasquez and Taylor's (2001) *foundations* framework has much to offer in rebuilding the public relations history time machine because it promotes a limitless timescape for incorporating elements of relationship and community building in the U.S. and beyond prior to the 20th century and supports non-Western efforts to chronicle public relations history by avoiding an impulse to steep the story in Western contexts. Outside the U.S., public relations phenomena have been examined in pre- and Christian biblical times (Sriramesh et al., 1999), in late-19th century Germany (Bentele, 2015), and other contexts. Developing nations such as Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe's emerging democracies continue to experience the foundations stage (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). Considering Vasquez and Taylor's (2001) five-stage development framework, as well as focusing on public relations' community building function prior to the 20th century (Pompper, 2021) sets the tone for including other precursors to professional public relations practice that *have* involved the work of women and people of color.

Theorizing Secondary Status and Margins

Stereotyping effects offer an incomplete view of change agency and leadership in the public relations history story as communicated in our textbooks. When groups of people are relegated to society's margins (hooks, 1990), their lived experiences are obscured. Social identity intersectionality (gender and ethnicity/race) -role stereotypes are deeply embedded in U.S. culture. To better understand stereotyping effects, enjoining feminist and critical race theories – as part of public relations' postmodern turn (Holtzhausen, 2013) – promotes critique of too few people of color and women in the telling of public relations history. Back in the 1970s, feminist scholars problematized causes and implications of women's secondary status by recovering women's history (Byerly, 2018) for a deeper understanding of historical events. Digging into history to investigate power discrepancies also is a cornerstone of the social identity intersectionality approach of CRT (Crenshaw, 1991), which has become part of the public relations body of knowledge (Pompper, 2005). Yet, too little DEI research in public relations has examined homophily's historical roots, and so this current study responds to a call to "grow public relations history" (Lamme et al., 2009, p. 156).

If stakeholders, practitioners, and students are largely female and we live in a multicultural world, it is logical that textbooks' public relations history must give greater attention to people of color and women beyond the token one or two currently mentioned. Too few representations of DEI among public relations history pages translate to public relations practitioners often having an incomplete background in their chosen occupation's actual history. After all, we humans have a *need* to belong as part of a community in relationships with others, according to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of human needs model.

Feminist and Critical Race Theory (CRT) Lenses

Lenses of feminist and critical race theories undergird this study of U.S.-based PR instructors' perceptions of introductory public relations textbooks' history chapters. CRT builds on insights of radical feminism to identify socio-racial hierarchies and redress historical wrongs to make society better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Like CRT, feminist theory is increasingly diverse and flexible when conjoined with other theory streams as it invites re-examinations and rewriting of historical narratives. At their heart, both CRT and feminist theory are designed to expose oppression, propose solutions for eliminating it, and to contribute to social justice (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; Tong, 2009).

While not consciously undergirding their work with CRT or feminist theory, several public relations researchers have critiqued a "great man" history of public relations. For example, opposed to dethroning figures like Lee and Bernays, Lamme (2015) instead recommended using their example to "demonstrate the need for a more expansive and demanding analysis of [those] to whom we turn for precedents, inspiration and wisdom" (p. 52). Her critique is rooted in Gustavson's (1955) synopsis of a person's historical role according to either determinism (events would have occurred even without the *great person*) or "Great Man theory" (usually, the *great person* is a man who is uplifted to superhero status) – and the scholar's role in untangling the two (p. 123). According to Lamme (2015), unless we critique the words and context of a *great person*, we risk "institutionalizing those carefully crafted public personas as bona fide contributions to the historical record" (p. 54). When feminist historians of the late 19th and early 20th century periods found that women were largely absent from history books, they engaged in new research that continues to impact ways we think of gender and intersections with other social identity dimensions, such as ethnicity/race. Similar outcomes resulted with researchers of ethnicity/race in public relations pointing out a dearth of attention to people of color in theory building (e.g., Hon, 1995; Pompper, 2005) and public relations textbooks (Kern-Foxworth, 1990).

Textbooks and Stasis

Many public relations researchers have reflected on the historiography of public relations (e.g., Fitch & L'Etang, 2020; McKie & Xifra, 2014; Olasky, 1987; Pearson, 1992; Szyszka, 1997) and perhaps the best way to investigate how public relations history is told is to examine our textbooks. We've known for some time that public relations historical accounts of women's achievements and contributions of people of color are woefully inadequate (e.g., Lamme, 2015; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). While we have witnessed opening of the Museum of Public Relations in New York City, and experienced conference presentations amplifying the contributions of women and people of color that sometimes result in peer-reviewed journal articles, public relations history in our textbooks has failed to expand beyond a *great White/Caucasian man* benchmark.

Generations of college students rely on learning about the past from textbooks – which viewed through feminist theory and CRT lenses – suggest embedded shortcomings. It is not unusual to find "narrowness and inadequacies" among historical narratives (Morrissey, 1992, p. 134) with conventional college textbooks' history coming "close to ignoring women entirely" (Riley, 1994, p. xii). Cutlip, Center, and Broom's popular *Effective Public Relations*, now in its 11th edition, is a bestseller on Amazon.com, with a slight title change to Cutlip & Center's *Effective Public Relations* and now authored by Glen M. Broom and Bey-Ling Sha (2013). This textbook is on PRSA's Accredited Public Relations exam "shortlist" for exam study resources, https://www.praccreditation.org/resources/recommended-texts/index.html (B-L Sha, personal communication, October 28, 2019). Broom and Sha's (2013) chapter devoted to public relations history has changed little over the years and now briefly mentions 20th century achievements of Doris E. Fleischman and Betsy Plank. A scan of the book's index for *women* lists only two, both from the 18th century – a Caucasian/White woman who published anti-British plays and poems and an African-American woman author and former slave. Cutlip's (1995) public relations history book liberally covers contributions made by a series of Caucasian/White men, including Amos Kendall, a member of U.S. President Andrew Jackson's kitchen cabinet, and several other political leaders and supporters.

Altogether, public relations history seems to have two fathers and a cautionary-tale male publicist, but noticeably absent from recorded public relations history telling are detailed stories about women and people of color. Rather, Caucasian/White males Lee and Bernays long have been attributed with founding U.S. public relations practice early in the 20th century for their ability to aid corporations. P. T. Barnum has been a poster person for press agentry or "craft public relations," which is considered less excellent than the two-way symmetrical model of practice (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1992, p. 312). Lee (1877-1934) is said to have invented the public relations profession when he opened a consultancy in 1904. Hiebert's (1966/2017) biography of the "father of public relations" explained how Lee provided opinion leaders with Standard Oil's perspective following exposés of muckraking Progressive Era journalists like Ida Tarbell whose investigative journalism eventually led to the breakup of Standard Oil's monopoly. The other oft-credited father of PR is Bernays (1891-1995), whom it is said invented the public relations profession in the 1920s. When Ewen (1996) wrote his "social history of public relations," (p. 5), he interviewed 104-year-old Bernays, whom Life magazine listed in 1990 among 100 most influential Americans of the twentieth century. Bernays is credited with writing the first book on public relations (DiStaso, 2019) and teaching the first public relations class in 1923 (Broom & Sha, 2013).

According to a number of researchers, public relations textbooks are due for updating in this postmodern period. The traditional linear advancement model promotes a "PR progress myth" (Duffy, 2000, p.

312) as a line that connects a progression of persuasion tools throughout Antiquity, then leaps ahead to Lee's advocating for John D. Rockefeller Jr. when dealing with striking coal miners in 1914. Such bookends leave a significant time gap in between and offer a limited, modernist, U.S.-centric history of public relations. Alternately, a postmodern pedagogy – as advocated for by feminist and critical race theorists – might see public relations history as a series of stories told from different perspectives by adding "previously muffled voices and heretofore unseen viewpoints" (Duffy, 2000, p. 313). Around the world, many public relations textbooks offer a limited view of public relations history embedded with U.S.-centric examples (Fitch, 2016). In Europe, this perspective on public relations history merely echoes U.S. corporate and government communication activities (L'Etang, 2008; McKie & Munshi, 2007). As *Journal of Public Relations Research* editor in 2004, Linda Hon told an audience of Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) members during the annual convention in Toronto that overall, too little research was emerging on public relations history. Still later, Lamme and Russell (2010) argued for a "broad, long-term view" to a time before industrialization and to additional contexts such as "the political and sociocultural sphere" (p. 281).

Stasis in public relations history telling in textbooks suggests reluctance to move beyond honoring of Caucasian/White men who enabled professionalization of the field and defaulting with U.S.-centric reverence for 20th century industrial capitalism and emergence of mass media which were managed and run by Caucasian/White men. We fail to break with the past and make our present day more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Gower (2006) suggested at least a decade ago that public relations research was "at a crossroads" and we must explore new options while "questioning our knowledge base" (pp. 177, 178). Kern-Foxworth (1990) also identified the problem 30 years ago, calling for change, and then Duffy (2000) followed up; public relations textbooks continually must evolve as relevant pedagogical tools given their socializing role and power in shaping viewpoints about people and issues (Van Dijk, 1989). Upon on this foundation, we posed the following questions:

RQ1: Which textbooks do U.S.-based PR instructors use for the basic Introduction to Public Relations course?

RQ2: What are U.S.-based PR instructors' perceptions of PR textbooks' history chapter?

RQ3: Which (if any) materials are used in addition to the textbook's history chapter to teach students about public relations history? Why?

Method

Perceptions of college instructors who develop and use pedagogical materials are important to ensure the best learning experience for today's students who are tomorrow's communication practitioners. We used an online survey research method to collect data to respond to research questions. The survey link was sent to the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). A total of 70 respondents completed the online questionnaire, for a response rate of 3%. Comparisons of response rates with traditional paper and online surveys yield mixed results. Online survey response rates for external audiences can be as low as 2% (Survey data collection, n.d.), so the convenience of online techniques can be a tradeoff (Nulty, 2008).

A questionnaire consisting of 13 probes was tested with 15 colleagues working at universities other than our own and feedback was used to improve clarity and completeness. See Appendix A. Institutional Review Board processes were followed at our university and approval was granted. On the instrument, a screener question determined potential respondents' eligibility: Are you teaching or have taught a basic Introduction to Public Relations course? Eight questions followed, inviting respondents to: 1) quantify years' experience teaching an Introduction to Public Relations course, 2) identify the primary Introduction to Public Relations course textbook used, 3) identify any required reading of the textbook's history chapter, 4 & 5) indicate degrees of satisfaction with the textbook's history chapter attention to contributions made by women and people of color, 6) identify any supplemental materials used to teach public relations history and 7) offer an explanation of why. A follow-up open-ended question enabled respondents to 8) write in "anything else you'd like to tell us about use of your textbook's history chapter(s) in educating your students about the history of public relations." Then, two questions probed respondents' gender and age ("only as you feel comfortable"). The final three questions probed whether respondents taught at a public or private university, in the U.S. or not in the U.S., and number of years teaching public relations. In all, seven probes were closed-ended (not counting the screener question determining survey participation) and six probes included open-ended components. Qualtrics was used to disseminate the instrument during December 2019-January 2020. Three reminder email messages were sent to inspire participation.

Once the Qualtrics link closed, data were subjected to frequency tabulations and an Excel spreadsheet was used to catalog open-ended responses according to patterns among respondents' perceptions. Finally, we examined all results through feminist and CRT lenses so that we might offer responses to research questions with recommendations to instructors of public relations classes and textbook authors in the context of interpreting respondents' perceptions as they shed light on oppression by proposing solutions for eliminating it and, overall, contributing to social justice. This study was designed to respond to an overall need to genuinely achieve authentic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in public relations history telling.

Findings

Research participants (*n* = 70) were 34 men (49%) and 16 women (23%), 18 preferred not to self identify, and 2 identified as "other." Regarding age, 21% (*n* = 15) of participants were in their 30s, 17% (*n* = 12) were in their 40s, 16% (*n* = 11) were in their 50s, 11% (*n* = 8) were their 60s, and 7% (*n* = 5) were 70+. About half (56%, *n* = 39) reported working in a public college/university and 37% (*n* = 26) in a private college/university. Most participants (71%, *n* = 58) reported working at a U.S. college/university and 12 (29%) reported working at a non-U.S. college/university. Length of time teaching public relations courses was: 17% (*n* = 12) have taught 20+ years, 26% (*n* = 18) have taught 10-19 years, and 21% (= 15) have taught 5-9 years.

Respondents who reported teaching a basic introduction to public relations course said they had taught the course: more than 5 times (53%), more than once (33%), and once (14%).

RQ1: Which textbooks do U.S.-based PR instructors use for the basic introduction to public relations course?

Findings suggest that participants assign introductory public relations textbooks from a primary pool of nine books (see Table 1). Seventy percent of participants indicated they ask students to read the history chapter of the assigned textbook and 4% indicated the book they assign does not include a history chapter.

RQ2: What are U.S.-based PR instructors' perceptions of PR textbooks' history chapter?

Many participants indicated degrees of dissatisfaction with public relations textbooks' history chapters because they focus mainly on "old white men" in their influences on development of the public relations profession. Participants emphasized that they supplement readings with some other textbooks' history chapter and other readings to introduce their students to women and people of color who contributed to the growth of the public relations field. Regarding satisfaction levels with their adopted textbook's history chapter, most participants' reaction was a neutral degree of satisfaction in providing their students with a complete understanding of contributions by women to the development of public relations (M = 3.33, SD = 1.21). In addition, most participants indicated a low level of satisfaction with their adopted textbook's history chapter in providing students with a complete understanding of contributions by people of color to the development of public relations (M = 2.81, SD = 1.30).

RQ3: Which (if any) materials are used in addition to the textbook's history chapter to teach students about public relations history? Why?

Sixty three (90%) survey participants indicated that they supplement their assigned textbook's history chapter with other materials such as journal articles, additional books and book chapters, videos and TV series shows, PRSA resources, Institute of Public Relations materials, the Museum of Public Relations website link, and other industry-related websites when they cover public relations history. Thirty eight (54%) participants indicated that for public relations history lessons, they feel compelled to move beyond the textbook they've assigned to show specific examples of practice and messaging media, to expand traditional foci, and to add perspectives beyond that of a U.S.-centric telling of public relations history.

Discussion & Conclusion

We have much to learn about roles women and people of color played in development of professional public relations because public relations history has not been a welcoming space for them. Both feminist theory and CRT have aided public relations researchers in reversing negative exclusion trends and both proved helpful in this current study designed to examine public relations instructors' perceptions of introductory textbooks' as part of goals to expose oppression, propose solutions for eliminating it, and to contribute to social justice. Positioning work of Caucasian/White males as the starting point for public relations' professionalization – and failure to incorporate contributions of women and people of color to the development of our field – has grave implications. For years, public relations history-studying scholars have emphasized that lack of information about public relations-like engagement in the early 20th century (and even earlier) has contributed to incomplete stories about our history (e.g., Gower, 2006; L'Etang, 2014a, 2014b; Pompper, 2021). This limitation partly explains the dearth of information about contributions by women and people of color, but we argue that no longer should we be satisfied with this as a rationale for not tackling this concern. Further, more research is needed to fully investigate if/how development of the field long ago led to marginalization of women and people of color in the field.

Since both CRT and feminist theory are designed to expose oppression and propose solutions for eliminating it, we directly asked research participants their satisfaction levels with their assigned textbook's history chapter(s) in providing students with a complete understanding of contributions by women and ethnic/racial minorities to the development of public relations. This can help us to indicate degrees to which women and people of color are missing across introductory public relations textbooks' history pages and to offer solutions for improving undergraduate education about DEI in the development of public relations. Incorporating women's and people of color's achievements in our history could encourage other disciplines to cite our research and provide role models for our students. Survey results reported in the 2017 Commission on Public Relations Report (DiStaso, 2019) may tell us that public relations history is an important curriculum component, but instructors who participated in our survey suggest they are not completely satisfied with the scope of the history chapters in the most popular public relations textbooks. This means they feel compelled to supplement the textbooks with

additional pedagogical materials. Public relations curricula have been criticized for coming up short in developing students as a pipeline for future practitioners. According to some researchers, students need better research skills and analyses for "a more historical and historiographical understanding of public relations" (Fitch & L'Etang, 2020, p. 703).
Our critical analysis suggests that we must do better and we offer these recommendations moving forward:

1. Consider adopting the five-stage public relations development framework (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001), which avoids homophily and ethnocentrism that can be a result of power dynamics associated with thinking of public relations history as a "progression."
2. Open the public relations history lens beyond the 20th century with its over-emphasis on capitalism, formal organizations, and mass media by also considering public relations' community building function (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988). Stories from the 20th century tend to amplify public sphere voices while squelching voices of women in the private sphere and people of color everywhere.
3. Revise current accounts of public relations history in introductory texts to include a greater number of important contributions made by women, people of color, and other heretofore marginalized groups to avoid potential perception that authors and book publishers do not consider inclusive public relations history to be an important facet of public relations curricula.

The purpose of this study was not to simply criticize research and writing that has led to documenting important milestones in our profession. Rather, we suggest that temptation throughout the 20th century to benchmark the launch of professional public relations with any century other than that present one – with an over-emphasis on Caucasian/White male achievements and economic underpinnings – was too strong to resist. Perhaps this explains survey participants' reluctance to move beyond a "neutral" degree of satisfaction with their textbook's history chapter, for fear of offending colleagues or betrayal of what *they* also had been taught in college. The J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) four models set up public relations history as a progression – an evolutionary march from early-20th century press-agentry developed in tandem with mass media and profit-centered industry – toward ethical, professional practice. By contrast, Vasquez and Taylor's (2001) five-stage framework for considering professional public relations' development in terms of foundations, expansion, institutionalization, maturation, and professionalization, promotes a more inclusive timescape for incorporating heretofore marginalized voices of people of color and women, as well as global perspectives on public relations history. This model offers greater flexibility than the four evolutionary models given that the stages are not mutually exclusive, may be applied in any socio-political context, and sets the tone for defining public relations in the 21st century by avoiding ethnocentrism as an outcome of power dynamics.

Another way to address our field's history shortcomings and to better understand our present is to look at "why public relations developed in the first place" (Gower, 2006, p. 181). Also, we must ask: Is it appropriate to talk about the work of public relations before the term itself was formally introduced? L'Etang (2008) opined that it is appropriate, adding that doing so is necessary for contextualizing the public relations concept, locating it as a human communication practice, and offering a means for connecting public relations to "more richly textured understandings of the discipline" (p. 329).

Interest in public relations history has been growing. In the 1950s, practitioners' perspectives filled textbooks with profiles and "uncritical accounts" (Fitch & L'Etang, 2017, p. 118). Since 2009, attention to public relations history has escalated as Tom Watson (2013) launched an annual "International History of PR Conference" at the University of

Bournemouth. Furthermore, Watson created new publication opportunities in the 2010s with special history-themed issues of *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research*. His efforts have inspired "the professionalization of PR historical work" (Fitch & L'Etang, 2017, p. 119). After examining research presented at the public relations history conferences and elsewhere, Bentele (2013) offered a simple taxonomy to organize public relations history directions: 1) national public relations histories, 2) historical development of organizations, and 3) meta -theoretical or -methodological approaches to public relations historiography. We propose an additional direction: Use feminist and critical race theory lenses to amplify public relations history's stories without relying exclusively on the 20th century time stamp. Given that PRSA lists textbooks as part of the public relations body of knowledge and that PRSA endorses a responsibility to embrace DEI, it is logical to conclude that public relations' textbook history chapters should offer broader views on who is included as making history and who contributed to development of this field of practice.

Writing public relations history is not without theoretical and methodological challenges. We suspect that many instructors, generally speaking, supplement PR textbook chapters beyond the history chapter, to tailor learning experiences for their students. Recognizing both the opportunities and the limitations of historical paradigms and methods must be acknowledged. Similarly, limitations of the current exploratory study include non-generalizability of findings and a U.S.-centric focus. Our study focused on PR history in the U.S., but further inquiry is necessary to examine the need for (and current pedagogical materials' ability to meet this need for) attention to international PR history beyond colonial and U.S.-centric impact and approaches for maximum cultural diversity. Future studies could include mixing methods such as a formal content analysis of public relations textbooks' history chapters, interviews with textbook authors, and another survey with a larger and international sample. Instructors who participated in the current study may consider textbooks merely as a starting point for developing lectures and course materials on their own. Future researchers of public relations' history chapter may consider adding an additional method such as formal content analysis to scrutinize historical accounts among the top textbooks, especially comparing eras framed and identifying gaps. Doing so would build upon these survey findings of public relations instructors' perceptions and strengthen our argument urging for a more diverse telling of public relations history to better accommodate students. We hope that findings of this critical perspective on public relations textbooks used to teach introductory courses may be used to correct egregious oversights in public relations history telling.

A dearth of DEI among public relations historical scholarship sets the tone for a lack of diversity in public relations textbooks, but this is no excuse for avoiding the hard work of attending to DEI in public relations pedagogical materials. We recognize that most public relations textbook authors are not historians and that they rely upon the literature. Russell and Lamme (2016) grappled with outlining criteria for who should and who should not be included in public relations history stories. We encourage maximum attention to DEI to ensure stories and contributions better represent our history. So, we urge colleagues to reconstruct the public relations history time machine by considering lived experiences of women and people of color who have contributed to what we now consider to be professional public relations. For example, we support theory building work that builds upon projects such as Denise Hill's "Hidden Figures in Public Relations History" podcast (Finneman, 2016). Also, Kern-Foxworth's critique of stereotypical representations of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben in corporate messaging (1994) and lack of ethnic inclusion in public relations textbooks (1990) has grown new relevance since emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement and corporations' changes to their brand logos. We endorse including Vardeman and colleagues' (2019) analysis of social movements as each movement has played out on a global stage. Also, important contributions of Ofield Dukes, a prominent Washington, D.C., organizer for the Black Public Relations Society have yet to be fully explored in textbooks' telling of public relations history, as well as the community building work of U.S. westward movement women of the 19th century, and activism of The Reverend Barbara Harris, a Philadelphia African-American practitioner-activist who began her career at the public relations firm of another African-American practitioner, Joseph Varney Baker, and became its president in 1958.

Even though educators who participated in the annual undergraduate public relations education survey rated PR history knowledge/skills/abilities more highly than practitioners (DiStaso, 2019), we hope that public relations practitioners, too, might concur that limited perspectives on our history could short change students who are working to build confidence, strategic management and leadership skills, and an inclusive outlook required for ethical public relations practice. Public relations has been qualified as a "small and young academic domain" that benefits from being made even more legitimate by virtue of its "different stories about the history of a widely used communication practice" (Wehmeier, 2015, p. 106).

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Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 171-202

"We Should Have to Take Therapy Classes": The Need for a Trauma-Informed Approach to Public Relations Education

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ABSTRACT

Through interviews with female public relations educators, this study explored their lived experiences with emotion and student trauma as part of teaching and service obligations. Additionally, it examined how aspects of faculty's own identity influence their feelings of willingness or ability to handle this often less visible aspect of our work. Findings from this study revealed the way that understanding trauma and vicarious trauma is vital in classroom settings—even those that do not actively deal with trauma. The goal of this study is to begin developing a trauma-informed approach to public relations education that better prepares educators for the emotional aspects of their various roles in academia and how to help students navigate emotional experiences.

Keywords: educator identity, emotional labor, feminist pedagogy, trauma, trauma-informed

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted June 29, 2020. Revision submitted November 4, 2020. Manuscript accepted for publication February 9, 2021. First published online September 2021.

In a 2020 article in the *Journal of Public Relations Education*, Bardhan and Gower provided a succinct overview of what many public relations scholars focused on issues of diversity and inclusion have been advocating for years: the crucial need for the public relations classroom to evolve past a space seen as simply technical, value-neutral training for the profession (e.g., Brown et al., 2011; Pompper, 2005; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). McKie and Munshi (2009) have argued that public relations students "must be prepared to engage in critical, reflective discussion and argument about the most pressing issues of contemporary society" (pp. 461-462). For many public relations educators and students, though, pressing issues such as racial injustice are not simply intellectual arguments happening in the classroom. These issues, particularly for marginalized groups, have real and tangible impacts on their lives outside of the classroom space. Additionally, students and educators alike are navigating a new reality for teaching and learning created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively impacted the health, safety, and well-being of individuals and communities (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). As educators, we cannot ignore these lived realities of our students or see student experiences as isolated from our roles in the classroom.

Furthermore, in the public relations field where we train students to be avid consumers of news and social media, the relentless onslaught of coverage of traumatic events facilitated by social media and 24-hour news coverage is having documented effects on mental health (Wayne, 2016). As such, there is a heightened awareness of the impact of trauma at both an individual and collective level (e.g., Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). While a few communication related subfields (most notably journalism) have dealt with the effects of trauma on students (e.g., Dworznik & Grubb, 2007), overwhelmingly postsecondary educators in our field receive little to no pedagogical training on navigating trauma with our students, both inside and outside of the classroom. While this is not an issue unique to public relations, it is a discussion that public relations educators need to have as more people embrace the classroom space as a place to talk through challenging issues, such as racial discrimination and inequity, sexual harassment in the workplace, and gun violence.

Through interviews with 10 female public relations educators, we sought to understand their lived experiences with emotion and student trauma as part of teaching and service obligations. Furthermore, we explored how aspects of their identity influence their willingness or ability to handle this less visible aspect of our work. Our goal is to begin developing a trauma-informed approach to public relations education that better prepares public relations educators for the emotional aspects of their various roles in academia, which may include helping students navigate emotional experiences.

Literature Review

The following literature review provides an overview of the manifestation of trauma in higher education classrooms. Then, we more specifically discuss scholarship on emotion in public relations and draw connections to public relations education. Finally, research into educator identity and role strain are discussed.

Trauma in Higher Education

Much of the scholarly work on trauma and educational settings is conducted in the K-12 educational context (e.g., Cavanaugh, 2016). Yet, the impact of trauma does not simply go away once students begin their postsecondary education. Trauma is linked to systems of power, so who defines trauma and how it is defined have important implications for how people are impacted (Becker-Blease, 2017). While we recognize the limitations of all definitions, we start with the definition of individual trauma as:

> an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful

> or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration , 2019, para. 1)

In other words, trauma can cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions, overwhelming a person's ability to cope with their circumstances (Poole & Greaves, 2012). While trauma is often associated with abuse, neglect, or violent acts, it can be caused by any experiences that are out of a person's control and undermine a person's sense of safety and self-efficacy.

Educators must consider "student emotional safety as a necessary condition" for learning (Carello & Butler, 2014, p. 163). To illustrate the needs of contemporary students, a 2017 survey of undergraduate college students by the American College Health Association (2017) reported that students felt hopeless (51% reporting), overwhelmed (87%), exhausted (84%), lonely (62%), and depressed (40%). Although 40% of students self-reported feeling depressed within the last 12 months, only 17% reported seeking treatment from a professional. When asked "Within the last 12 months, [which of the following has] been traumatic or very difficult" 48% identified "academics" and more than half reported three or more of the listed issues, which included finances, sleep, and family issues. Although college educators should not be taking on the role of professional counselors, we must recognize that these issues can affect student performance in the classroom.

Rather than focusing solely on individual pathology, though, this project situates itself with approaches to understanding trauma that connect personal experiences to broader social systems that allow for trauma and oppression (Gómez et al., 2016). This is in line with Cvetkovich's (2007) scholarship on public feelings, which works to "create an approach to trauma that focuses on the everyday and insidious rather than the catastrophic and depathologizes trauma and situates it in a social and cultural frame rather than a medical one" (p. 464). For example, issues such as racism, discrimination, and microaggressions have documented effects on the physical and mental health of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2016). The term racial trauma is used to describe the race-based stress that results from experiences of discrimination (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Historical traumas such as slavery, colonization, and genocide can have intergenerational effects. For people belonging to multiple marginalized identities, "intersectional oppression such as racial, gender, sexual orientation, and xenophobic microaggressions contribute to the cumulative effects of racial trauma" (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019, p. 1). In other words, trauma does not just impact individuals; it also impacts communities.

Furthermore, people do not have to be directly affected by trauma to experience the effects of trauma. Vicarious trauma is when an individual experiences a traumatic event through indirect exposure. This indirect exposure is often gained through the storytelling of someone who experienced a traumatic event firsthand, making certain professions more susceptible to it (Carello & Butler, 2014). As Trippany et al. (2004) suggest, this is more than just being stressed out by difficult students. Vicarious trauma can have a strong impact on an individual's understanding of themselves, their surroundings, and the world. Not surprisingly, a large portion of the research on trauma and vicarious trauma has focused on the relationship between the social worker/therapist/counselor and their patient (e.g., Bride, 2007; Trippany et al., 2004), and less has focused on the professor and student relationship. This provides an opportunity to fill the gap in literature about how trauma affects educators in the higher education classroom. For this project, we focus specifically on public relations educators.

Lack of Research on Emotion in Public Relations Education

Public relations professors often serve as boundary spanners between the worlds of academia and public relations practitioners. Although a small body of research has developed around the emotional experiences and requirements of public relations practitioners (e.g., Bridgen, 2011; Pieczka, 2006; Yeomans, 2007), little to no research to date has explored the role that emotion plays for public relations professors. Hochshild (2003) argued that the occupation of professor requires substantial amounts of emotional labor. Within academia, Bellas (1999) found that the emotional labor required of teaching and service aligned most closely with culturally feminine characteristics, with women spending more time on these tasks. In contrast, research and administration, viewed as more masculine, were afforded more time by men (Bellas, 1999). Similar to the technician/manager divide in public relations (Bridgen, 2011), the academic reward structure typically devalues the more emotional tasks that are assigned to or taken on by women.

Part of the reason for a lack of engagement with emotion as a topic in public relations education research may be because of a reliance on traditional Eurocentric masculine pedagogy, which validates removing oneself from the object of study and divorcing reasoning from emotions (Collins, 1989). Yet, there are alternative teaching approaches. As bell hooks (1989) wrote, "The feminist classroom is and should be a place where there is a sense of struggle, where there is visible acknowledgement of the union of theory and practice" (p. 51). hooks (1989) noted that this way of teaching is a "feminist intervention" and educators must "relinquish our ties to traditional ways of teaching that reinforce domination" (p. 52). This includes centering 'personal stuff' as a focus in the classroom. When students can make connections between their lived experiences, which includes their emotions, it can magnify critical understandings of the lessons and classroom material (Valle-Ruiz et al., 2015).

Regardless of whether an individual identifies as a feminist instructor, the practice of these classroom management strategies can affect professors in substantial ways. Professors who understand the variety and diversity of lived experiences may actively include (or at least not avoid) emotionally charged subjects, such as sexual violence, racism, and ableism (Durfee & Rosenberg, 2009). This, in combination with an open approach to classroom dynamics, marks professors as non-judgmental advocates. For students who are experiencing trauma, talking about tough issues in the classroom may open the door for the student to disclose what is going on in their lives.

Educator Identity and Role Strain

Managing student disclosures can be one of many responsibilities facing faculty in higher education, with a large burden of this emotional labor falling on female professors (Lawless, 2018). Emotional labor refers to the "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 2003, p. 7). Female faculty are susceptible to these disclosures because gender expectations tend to pigeonhole women in a role of a social support provider (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). The role of 'counselor' is then added to the list of roles for female faculty, which may also include research supervisor, academic adviser, teacher, and/or mentor (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010).

As the work of Tindall (2009) has demonstrated, there is also a double bind of race and gender for Black female public relations faculty. Professors of color face an additional burden of "negotiating a devalued racial status" that requires extensive emotional management in addition to bearing the burden of their own collective cultural trauma as described previously (Harlow, 2003, p. 348). Outside of the classroom, though, professors of color often have additional, often unseen labor; for example, they frequently help to mentor and guide students of color who come to them for support (Turner, 2002).

The intersection of these different roles, personas, and responsibilities can result in considerable strain for professors. Stress may be added when the professor does not feel appropriately supported or trained to handle the situations (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). Instead, issues are often addressed as one-off situations as they arise, rather than recognizing the systemic impact of trauma on our students and ourselves.

Based on this literature review, the following three research questions are posed:

RQ1: How, if at all, is trauma experienced by female public relations professors in the classroom?

RQ2: How, if at all, is trauma experienced by female public relations professors outside of the classroom?

RQ3: How do the identities of the professors influence how they process/manage the emotional labor aspects of academia?

Methods

To answer our research questions, we conducted 10 qualitative interviews with public relations professors working as full-time, part-time, tenured, and untenured faculty members in the United States. We implemented a more postmodern approach to interviews, conducting our interviews using active interview techniques.

Active Interview

Traditionally, researchers implementing interview methods are looking "to understand the world from the subjects' point of view" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 1). The interview is a way for researchers to explore phenomena as they are experienced and interpreted by the interview participant (Englander, 2012). In these cases, the interview is a way to gather a truth according to the interviewee. A key tenant of the active interview is the redistribution of power. Active interviews approach the interview as a collaborative space, and the method is more concerned with process and the lived experience of the participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

The exchange of stories, experiences, empathetic statements, and concern provided an opportunity for meaning and knowledge creation to be constructed between the interviewee and interviewer, and not through the process of asking the “right” question and getting the “right” answer (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 68). In addition to being appropriate for the sample and subject matter, active interviewing addresses many feminist and intersectional critiques of method, which suggest that process is just as crucial as product (Haraway, 1988).

In the case of female public relations professors, we were most concerned with how our participants understood and interpreted their students’ trauma, their preparedness to handle those disclosures, and how these experiences affect their own personal and professional practice. Active interviewing provided us with the opportunity to probe and encourage our participants to avoid giving ‘ideal’ or ‘socially responsible’ answers, and it addressed multiple ways to interpret things and the multiple meanings that may arise related to our research questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

Research Positionality

The two authors of this study both enact a feminist pedagogy in their classrooms. According to Crabtree et al. (2009), feminist pedagogy “refers to a particular philosophy of and set of practices for classroom-based teaching that is informed by feminist theory and grounded in the principles of feminism” (p. 1). It is not just the infusion of feminist scholarship and topics into a standard lecture, but includes how a professor practices classroom management. These practices, which include consciousness-raising, social action, validating the personal experience, and social transformation, are centered around the idea that the classroom can be a place to empower an individual. Our goal is to cultivate a "nonhierarchical relationship among teachers and students and reflexivity about power relations" (Crabtree et al., 2009, p. 5). A feminist pedagogy, and a feminist research approach, requires self-reflexivity and addressing our own positionality (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007).

As tenure-track white female public relations professors, both of us have experienced our share of student traumatic disclosures while in graduate school and as junior faculty members. The sharing of these experiences in online spaces led to the collaboration on this project to explore how other professors handle these often emotionally laborious, sometimes vicariously traumatic events. Although data collection for this project occurred prior to 2020, issues of racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic have made our commitment to discussing trauma and vicarious trauma as educators even more important to us.

Sample

Once we decided to interview female public relations professors, we recognized the value in achieving a degree of diversity regarding racial identity, position, and university-type. Our convenience sample consisted of 10 participants with whom we had existing close professional and personal relationships: six identified as white, two as Black, one as Asian, and one as Asian-American. The types of institutions ranged from R1 residential universities (two), R1 commuter (two), R2 commuter (one), R2 residential (two), teaching-focused commuter (two), and HBCU residential (one). In addition to the range of university-types, we also interviewed seven full-time, tenure-track assistant professors; one associate professor; one full-time, tenure track instructor; and one full-time, non-tenure track instructor. Pseudonyms are used when writing the results for this study to protect the anonymity of the participants (Appendix 1). This study received IRB approval. While we took care to diversify our sample, we do recognize the limitations of the small sample size and potential biases from interviewing people with whom we have close associations.

Procedure and Analysis

We conducted semi-structured interviews, with the average interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Most interviews were conducted over the phone or through video conferencing software, with two interviews conducted face-to-face. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by our student-workers or graduate assistants.

We analyzed the data using a three-part analytical process. First, data were analyzed through an open coding approach, which identified general themes and codes. We read the transcripts in a close line-by-line manner. By starting with an open coding system, we could sort literal codes into more abstract ones (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Once literal and categorical themes were identified, we analyzed the data using an axial and selective coding process to build connections across various categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Results

In this section the results of the research are presented, discussing how female public relations professors experience trauma inside of the classroom, outside of the classroom, and how their identities influence how they process and manage the emotional labor aspects of academia.

Experience of Trauma Inside of the Classroom

Four primary themes emerged regarding the female professors' experiences with trauma inside of the classroom, which were *acknowledgement of public trauma, considerations of private trauma, personal disclosures as teachable moments, and balancing fairness with humanness*.

Acknowledgement of public trauma. The public relations professors interviewed discussed how collective, societal issues impact both the student and professor experience in the classroom. Carol, an African-American professor working at an HBCU, said that "it's a very traumatic experience to be Black in America," which heavily influences the classroom experience for her and her students. Considering her classroom of primarily African-American students, Carol said:

> We can't avoid discussions about Trump and whatever type of PR is going on with him, and then it also leads to discussions from there about their safety in America and how they feel about HBCU's being cut from funding and things like that. Students have expressed to me some things that I'd never thought about. One student said in class, sometimes they feel unsafe because with the climate in America that Trump has fostered with racism and outwards oppression, they feel that being on an HBCU campus, they are targeted. Because if someone wanted to do something to African-Americans there is a whole university, if they wanted to have a mass shooting or something.

Of importance is the recognition that this public trauma is not separate from public relations because "we need to train informed students who'll turn into informed practitioners." This is not just training in specific skills, but also a more holistic understanding of publics' historical and contextual experiences. Carol continued:

> Our work in the field is not separate from sexual assault, it's not separate from racism and discrimination, it's not separate anymore. I think once upon a time, we went to school, and we learned about PR, and we didn't talk about sexual assault because that ain't got nothing to do with what we're talking about here, and in this day and age it's just not separate.

Jade expanded upon this idea by saying that this is "work that often doesn't get discussed in communication curricula, but it helps bridge gaps between the social worlds that our students are living in and the possibilities of work that they can do outside of the traditional scope of strategic communication."

Considerations of private trauma. Several participants highlighted that students have been more interested in discussions about race and politics since 2016. This can be challenging for professors to navigate, though, because of considerations of the diverse experiences and potential traumas that students bring into the classroom. Ashley discussed her struggle with finding this balance, reflecting "how do you walk that line, how do you give them space to have those conversations because they're clearly desperate to have these conversations and not like offend people or make people uncomfortable." Jade brought up a discussion her class had about the Philando Castile shooting and said that "as a strategic social media class, it has absolutely nothing to do with race and politics and any of that kind of stuff, but my class often turns into a safe space for those kind of topics...because I feel like it's my job as someone in power to make space for those kind of conversations." As a result of this conversation, "two students hung out after class in my office with me, and they were talking. They were crying about how this particular Black man who was murdered by law enforcement, how it could have been their brother or their father."

Ashley further discussed considerations of potentially triggering students who have gone through traumatic experiences, such as sexual assault. In one class she had a student who had disclosed to her that she had been sexually assaulted and was visibly uncomfortable in class:

> I kinda tried… to keep it in a more positive space until class was over and I could talk to her and say, 'I tried'… So, we had a conversation about it later and she was like no, that that was fine, that she was okay with that. But I feel like I'm really cautious about having conversations about that particular topic when she's in the classroom. Chances are good that there are other students who have dealt with sexual assault in other ways in the classroom, or other sort of major traumatic stuff.

In addition to classroom conversations, private disclosures from students often come because of "a request for an extension on an assignment." Nicole continued that:

> It's an email saying 'I'm dealing with something can I please have an extension? I need to come talk to you in office hours.' And then they come talk in office hours, then, depending on the student, it snowballs, or they let a little bit out. I don't try to probe it out of them, but many of them are very forthcoming.

As a relatively new teacher, Lauren discussed the emotional labor of teaching she had not considered because "it's not just coming in and sort of saying, here today we're going to talk about crisis communication, but what kind of crises might be going on in your lives." For Lauren, having to consider these personal traumas of students comes into play because it "impacts whether they're going to turn in an assignment on time, so I'm having to sit down with them and say, 'Hey look what's going on? You're not turning in an assignment." Jessica echoed this sentiment by offering an example of a student who approached her after class regarding a breakup. This student told Jessica, "'He locked my computer and I do not have access.' That's what my students are experiencing. They sit in my classroom and that's what happens to their lives."

Personal disclosures as teachable moments. Professors also discussed the personal disclosures they made during the class that, if not traumatic, were difficult situations or moments they found themselves in that can serve as teachable moments for their students. Tellingly, these personal disclosures often come from the professor's experiences as part of a racial minority group or with organizational power dynamics. Carol and Lauren discussed racial discrimination they had experienced during their time as practitioners, as well as during graduate work. Carol said that "I'm very open with them, and I tell them about my experiences with discrimination... and how that impacted me and how I ultimately tried to use it for the better." Similarly, Lauren will utilize personal disclosures "as much as it fits with the conversation" to try "to weave in some experience that I've had and sort of position it in a way that they really sort of get what I'm talking about." Patricia will talk to her students about an experience she had as a young female at an ad agency when a male supervisor made a comment about her skirt length that made her feel uncomfortable.

Personal disclosures not only come from discriminatory experiences, but also just lived experiences that might provide affirmation or guidance to students who may be facing situations they never bring up to professors. Jade is open about her sexual orientation, gender identity, and experiences with mental health:

> I'm a very nontraditional female. I'm a very masculine presence. And so that's just my sort of functioning in the classroom. I, in certain circumstances, have disclosed my battles with mental health and my family history of that, if it fits with the context of the topic.

Becca utilizes personal disclosures during her ethics discussion to offer real-life examples.

Balancing fairness with empathy. Professors struggled with balancing empathy towards students who might be facing personal challenges during a semester with fairness towards all students in class. In discussing a plagiarism situation in which Patricia felt an honest mistake had been made, she said, "There's a lot of negotiating like [Patricia] the human and [Patricia] the administrator that has to address the faculty and explain why I didn't turn these students in to the university board." Ashley noted, "I think is the piece where I still struggle with the most." She continued, "How do I say, here's the policy, here's the thing I'm holding everyone to, but your life is shitty and I think those are extenuating circumstances, and so, I want to honor the fact that you confided in me or that I'm trying to help you with something. So how do I do that?" In describing a situation in which a student had fabricated a story about a traumatic incident, Bethany said:

> I thought about the ethics of care because I thought, in a normal situation, I would be like, "You lied about your absence, so I'm going to dock all those points." Like in a normal syllabus application situation, and I ended that view with the ethics of care because I thought, "Maybe she's barely surviving right now." I mean, she looked awful those final days she was attending class. Like, maybe she's barely staying alive and do I really need to tax her like that? So, I ended up not doing anything.

Because of her position as graduate director in her department, Patricia discussed the "whole faculty approach" in addressing known student trauma by "just giving the students flexibility with deadlines and helping them know there's resources on campus."

Experience of Trauma Outside of the Classroom

Three primary themes emerged around navigating the experience of trauma outside of the classroom, which included a need for *perspective taking*, combining this with a need for *boundary setting*, and a recognition that *we are not therapists* when students come to us with certain challenges, but there might be opportunities for professional development in that area.

Perspective taking. Participants often struggled with identifying what should be considered as trauma. For two of the professors interviewed, Hurricane Harvey had directly impacted their campus, so to them that was a clearly traumatic experience for the students and the community in which they live. In several interviews, participants talked about considering issues from the student's perspective. Nicole qualified the label of trauma when related to a student experience saying, "It's not like a trauma, like the typical trauma that you would think of when you think of the word, but it's something that is completely preventing the student from doing well." Lauren furthered this by discussing trauma as something "that's dramatic to the individual that really sort of lives with them, the core of who they are, and is hard for them to grapple with." Because people have different capacities to cope with negative events that can occur in their lives, in many cases this assessment of trauma is highly individualized and based on the specific circumstances. This can be emotionally taxing for public relations educators to consider, though, because as Ashley said it is often a situation that "requires sustained conversation or sustained aid."

Boundary setting. Particularly for those in administrative roles or with direct student advising responsibilities (whether academic or of PRSSA chapters), dealing with student trauma outside of the classroom was more of an issue than for those who primarily deal with students in a classroom setting. This can be a challenge for professors to set boundaries with students who may view them as a confidant and a friend, in addition to the professional relationship that exists. Because of the close relationship we can have with students—particularly graduate students, Patricia described a recent situation with a student she worked closely with who had experienced a breakup. She recognized that she had been "thinking about her a lot more and trying to reach out to her without passing over some kind of professional boundary." Not all female professors want to be viewed in this role by students, though. Bethany said that:

> I was pushing back against a student who kept trying to share and I just wanted to talk about her thesis. That was emotionally draining for me because I knew I wasn't meeting her needs and she was wanting me to meet her needs.

"We should have to take therapy classes." An overarching theme in this category was the exploration, and oftentimes unresolved conclusion, of when our roles shift from public relations professor to therapist. When talking about different options regarding how graduate students can be better prepared to manage traumatic disclosures as faculty members, Becca suggested that public relations professors take a course in psychology. She said, "We should have to take therapy classes." Nicole agreed with that sentiment, "Half the time I'm fine with it [the disclosures], and the other half of the time I'm sitting in there crying with them. I feel like I need a degree in counseling somedays to deal with this job."

For others, their own personal experiences with therapy helped them handle student disclosures. Ashley discussed using strategic disclosures of her own in combination with tactics she picked up in therapy to help her students cope. Ashley described the situation: "I've never been so glad that I've been to as much therapy as I have in my entire life because the time that she sat here basically felt like a therapy session, and I had to be like the therapist."

Patricia also used experience with therapy to help students. Patricia told us, "I've been to therapy. But also [my husband] is a therapist so we're constantly talking about the different therapies…. So, I kind of have a little bit of non-professional, but insider, understanding."

Identity and Emotional Labor in Academia

The way female public relations professors understood, processed, and acted on traumatic student disclosures was often connected with how they identified as people and professionals. Two primary themes emerged around this, which were *motherhood status* and *minoritized identities*.

Motherhood status. Nicole thought that the fact that she is a mother influenced how she interacted with students. When students come to her with their trauma, she often relies on her maternal instincts, even though she was unsure if that is an appropriate strategy. Nicole said, "What I do is provide a 'mom' experience – 'We love you no matter what' kind of thing. It's helpful in the moment, but what they need are suggestions and ways to get there." This identity is also what helps Nicole establish boundaries and practice self-care because her own children need her.

Becca told us how her lack of motherhood status influences the additional work she is asked to do:

> I don't have children which makes me one of only like one other person in the department who doesn't have kids. So, I don't have responsibilities like "I can't work Thursday night because I have to take so-and-so to Girl Scouts." So that's sort of been a theme in my adult career – that I don't have kids. So, people know if they need something, I can do it. I know that means I get asked to do things that other people don't get asked.

Minoritized identities. For Jade, she felt her visibility as a queer person on campus identified her as someone who could talk to and advocate on behalf of queer students. Although Jade acknowledged that as a marginalized woman it made sense that students seek her out, it still didn't necessarily make her feel comfortable with that role: "[A] particular student sort of latched onto me in ways that were uncomfortable for me as a faculty… Like they would confide in me. They would wait for me by my office even though we had no appointment." The student began to become more needy, which in turn took a toll on Jade. She said:

> On one particular occasion, the student had said to me that they were considering taking their own life. So, I had this legal and ethical responsibility to act on that knowledge. I called the health center on campus and I put the student in touch, but for me ... I would kind of go out of my way to avoid this particular student because engaging with them was often very emotionally exhausting and taxing.

As a person who has also navigated privileged spaces, Carol saw her role as a Black woman in higher education as an opportunity to lead by example. Carol talked about helping students find allies, and how to work with mentors who do not look like them. Showing students how to "govern" themselves in these institutionally white spaces added an extra layer of guilt when Carol thought about her own wellbeing as a professional. She explained:

> I'm the only PR professor, the students come to me for advising and looking for internships and for career development, so I spend a lot of my office hours with my students and sometimes I have to go to my colleague's office and hide out there. And you hide out because the students, I love them, they need a lot from me and I'm the only one.

Racial identity weighed on white faculty members in different ways. As a white woman, Ashley was cognizant of the power dynamic in the room when she tried to engage her predominantly African-American students about racial violence, "The first couple of times I tried to talk about it in my head I was like, 'Do I sound like an idiot? Am I somebody who can talk about this and students would actually want to participate in a conversation?'"

Talking about race also gave pause to Becca, but she felt it was too important to not include it in her conversations. In a lecture about branding and Aunt Jemima, Becca was nervous to move forward with describing the brand: "I was like, 'I'm going into this horribly racist description and I was so uncomfortable because I'm a white woman talking about racism. But yeah, I feel like it's important that we talk about it….'"

These examples suggest that female public relations professors are cognizant of their experiences, motherhood status, bodies, privilege, and/or oppression. These factors weigh heavily on how faculty manage student disclosures, what (or if) they choose to disclose anything about themselves, and the potential roles they believe they may play in a student's life.

Discussion

While we may talk about creating boundaries and policies to help alleviate the emotional creep of student trauma into our lives, the experiences of the researchers and those interviewed suggests that these boundaries can be quite permeable. It is with this in mind that we consider how we might provide faculty with more support and resources to handle the emotional labor of their jobs.

Reducing Role Strain: Supporting Students by Supporting Faculty

A struggle identified by all participants was how to balance the multitude of roles they are asked to take on in their professional careers. Many professors in this study indicated that they were not prepared for the types of disclosures they received; when taken in conjunction with the pressures of tenure, family life, service, and research responsibilities, they often felt like emotional labor they were not prepared to manage.

Research suggests that female faculty members, and women in general, are often socialized to cope out loud (i.e., seek out support during stressful times) (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). This often manifests in female faculty implementing a more "open door" policy when it comes to students looking for help, which was experienced by interviewees. This open-door policy, however, means female faculty must take care to set professional boundaries or they may find themselves at odds with the quantifiable measures of tenure, promotion, or their overall success as a faculty member. Another way that role strain manifested for faculty was through the lack of training incentives. Many of the faculty talked about the necessity of receiving training to be better equipped to handle these situations; but as Jade indicated, those who seek it out are usually not the faculty who need it the most. Jade, who works at an R1 university and feels a lot of pressure regarding how her time is best utilized, said about training, "Unless it's tied to our tenure or our merit or things like that, I think there needs to be institutional implementation of those things. There needs to be incentivization, because otherwise, people don't do it." She continued, "I'm already the one that's going to go to the diversity workshop even though all my work is informed by theories of diversity and inclusion. So, I'm not necessarily the one that needs to be at this."

The act of incentivization by administration could help build this emotional labor into the role of professor, which theoretically could reduce the role strain experienced by faculty (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). Initiatives can also involve better partnerships between departments and university resources. In many cases, public relations educators only knew what university resources existed by doing the legwork to help students find them. The resources that can help to emotionally support students should not be invisible, and we should not just see our responsibility to students as simply academic because their emotional wellbeing is implicated in academic success.

Trauma-Informed Leadership

Our sample of public relations professors were already primed to think about how to make their spaces more inclusive and healing for students. As the findings indicate, professors took great care to listen to students, strategically disclose their own identities or struggles, and seek out professional development opportunities to better serve their students' emotional needs. As we outlined, resources, incentives, and encouragement from administrators can help balance this workload and support faculty who are already doing the work, and those who want to better contribute to the efforts, which may alleviate role strain. Although individual classrooms and one-on-one relationships are often the site for these discussions, administrators and leaders can (re)think policies and environments that better support faculty and students during traumatic times. Although professional development may be crucial to establishing a trauma-informed pedagogy long-term, administrators must consider how the pandemic is affecting their faculty as well and work to not overburden faculty with meetings, webinars, and workshops.

Trauma-Informed Teaching: A Future Direction for Public Relations Education

Trauma-informed teaching is not advocating that public relations professors serve as therapists for students. Instead, "[i]n trauma-informed services, professionals are not required to treat trauma; rather, they approach their work with the understanding of how common trauma is among those they serve…" (Poole & Greaves, 2012, p. xvi). It is about acknowledging student trauma histories to make learning and safety central to the classroom experience (Carello & Butler, 2014). Developing trauma-informed educational environments has been found to improve student performance, educational climate, student retention, and overall teacher satisfaction (Oehlberg, 2008). This study calls on higher education to create a "culture of sensitivity through institutional implementation of trauma-informed practices" and buy-in from administrators (Crosby, 2015, p. 226). Establishing a trauma-informed classroom environment can include ensuring students know in advance what materials will be covered, intentionally selecting examples, knowing campus and community referrals, and handling student disclosures with empathy and care (McCammon, 1995).

A trauma-informed approach can be considered in line with a feminist ethic of care. An ethic of care focuses on obligations and responsibilities, a concern for others, and feelings of compassion, whereas an ethic of rights and justice focuses on a more rigid set of practices focused on fairness (Nunner-Winkler, 1994). We could see public relations educators struggling with this tension in their approaches to students, with most falling in line with what could be considered an ethic of care because of a flexibility in moral reasoning rather than rigid adherence to standardized rules and principles (Gilligan, 1982). While professional lines and boundaries are healthy and should certainly be maintained, there is more ambiguity within that stance that we believe needs to be recognized.

Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices: What Professors Can Do Now

Professors who are committed to approaching the classroom using a trauma-informed approach should look to feminist pedagogy, crisis communication, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic to glean strategies.

Feminist pedagogy. A major tenet of feminist pedagogy is the acknowledgement of lived experience and how those lived experiences influence classroom dynamics (Durfee & Rosenberg, 2009). As Lal (2000) indicates, the real world is the classroom and vice versa, so it is important for professors to center 'personal stuff' in the feminist classroom. Professors can provide a space for students to work through tough issues, such as sexual assault or racist microaggressions. The goal here is not necessarily to solve the issues for the student, but rather acknowledge that the classroom is a place where students can struggle (hooks, 1989).

Crisis communication. Not every student will respond to crisis or trauma in the same way, therefore flexibility is key for developing strategies. That said, Hobfell et al. (2007) outlined five essential components of mass trauma intervention, which can provide professors with a trauma-informed framework strategy: promoting safety, calming, sense of self and community efficacy, connectedness, and hope. Understanding these elements, in addition to knowing how to communicate using trauma-informed approaches that center trustworthiness and transparency, support, collaboration, and empowerment, are steps public relations professors can take to implement more trauma-informed practices (SAMHSA, 2014).

COVID-19 trauma. As the findings from this study indicate, faculty are at the frontline when it comes to providing support to their students during the pandemic, and the mental health impact of COVID-19 is another serious public health crisis. With social distancing and isolation increasing, so are the ramifications of that: heightened risk of depression and anxiety, increased substance abuse, domestic violence, and greater impact on already diagnosed mental health conditions (Haider et al., 2020).

The practices, strategies, and tactics learned and implemented during the pandemic can be applied to other student traumas. *Learning for Justice*, a collective of free resources for educators, recommends that educators not avoid or sanitize trauma. Dr. Kiara Lee-Heart (2020), a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, recommends acknowledging and legitimizing the pandemic's effect, engaging the topic, and giving students the space and means to analyze and be their own experts. Similar approaches can help students cope with other crises and traumas.

Conclusion

When asked if the participants felt they had been prepared to handle the emotional aspects of their job through graduate education or other forms of instructor training, without failure everyone laughed and said they had not been prepared at all. In order to grapple with these issues, though, we have to recognize that they exist and that female professors, often junior faculty, and especially women of color or professors in other minority groups, are doing this type of emotional labor without training or credit. Additionally, and most importantly, professors need to feel heard and supported. Many of our interviewees appreciated the opportunity to talk about these issues. It is important for us to recognize that we are not alone in these struggles.

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Appendix 1. Interview Participant Overview

Alias	Position	University Type	Race
Patricia	Associate Professor	R1, Commuter	White
Jade	Assistant Professor	R1, Commuter	White
Ashley	Assistant Professor	R2, Commuter	White
Carol	Assistant Professor	HBCU, Residential	Black
Lauren	Assistant Professor	R2, Residential	Black
Becca	Instructor	Teaching, Commuter	White
Jessica	Assistant Professor	Teaching, Commuter	Asian (Chinese)
Nicole	Instructor	R1, Residential	White
Emily	Assistant Professor	R1, Residential	Asian-American
Bethany	Assistant Professor	R2, Residential	White

Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 203-212

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2021

Pitch Perfect: Secrets of Media Relations

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Editorial Record: This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 19, 2021 deadline. JPRE invited top GIFTs authors to submit to JPRE by June 18, 2021. First published in September 2021.

Rationale

Public relations instruction is most effective when students are provided with opportunities to develop their capacities as practitioners. Educators often provide these applied experiences through academic service-learning partnerships, internships, and hands-on exercises. Media pitching is a unique, stylized process that requires a personalized approach gleaned through experience and persistence. Every pitch takes on a different feel based on the relationship with the blogger, editor, or reporter. Students commonly exhibit uncertainty constructing and delivering effective media pitches due to a lack of media experience and fear of rejection.

This activity (Appendix A) is appropriate for any course or student-run firm that would use media relations as a tactic. Following a firm theoretical foundation as described above, *Meet the Media Speed Pitching* uses Muck Rack's Public Relations Pitching Guide (Muck Rack, n.d.-a) alongside their Public Relations Management (PRM) platform to work together as a class to research local media for our local client pitches. The Muck Rack PR Pitching Guide (Knollmeyer, n.d.) focuses on using the ‘core six’ combinations of news values most journalists and educators agree on (Timeliness, Impact, Prominence, Proximity, Conflict and Human Interest) as a rubric (Appendices B and C) for relevant pitching (Gatlung & Ruge, 1973; Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1987). Students then construct a pitch based on information gleaned from the State of Journalism Report (Muck Rack, 2020a) and the ‘core six’ criteria. There is a little bit of training of the target journalist selected who also evaluates the student pitch based on the ‘core six’ as well as their unique media type and audience in the feedback which leads to a meaningful dialog in a low-stakes environment for practice and reflection.

Connection to Public Relations Practice and/or Theory

By leveraging numerous mass communication theories, including gatekeeping theory (Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; White, 1950), agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972); persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1987; Miller, 1989), framing theory (Entman, 1993; Hallahan, 1999), and uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), the foundations of media messaging are explored, and students examine the benefits of creating audience focused messaging. This assignment has been developed as an introduction to the process of media pitching. Recognizing that media pitching is a skill that requires creative thinking, persuasive communication, strategy, and media targeting, assessing best practices can be difficult and is often influenced by individual contexts. Possessing a firm understanding of mass media theory and a solid understanding of media pitch construction alleviates uncertainty and allows students to enter the field confident in their skill sets.

Student Learning Goals

1) Draft pitches that are relevant and focus on use of the ‘core six’ combinations; 2) Deliver a pitch in a non-electronic high stakes environment; 3) Engage in meaningful dialogue on behalf of a client with a member of the media; 4) Networking with members of the media; 5)

Practice researching, constructing, pitching and follow-up for a real client; 6) Real life/real time use of follow-up emails and phone calls with reporter post pitch; 7) Reflection on media relations process and experience.

Assessment

The benefits to students are numerous, especially in relation to the PR industry where media relations is a core component. After completing this assignment, students recognize various mass communication and persuasive theories, identify the importance of strategy and targeting in PR, and analyze the role relationships play within the profession. This assignment is applicable to a variety of courses within the PR discipline including writing, social media, and case studies. This activity appeals to a wide range of students because it is interactive, allows for creative execution and community engagement. They are excited to learn how their creativity and personalized approaches play a role in their successes as future practitioners. Finally, higher levels of confidence regarding the 'core six' and lower levels of anxiety related to the process and prospect of pitching local media based on rubric feedback from professionals (Appendix B).

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Appendix A The Assignment: Meet the Media Speed Pitching

This activity enables PR teams to work together to find the right journalists for their class or student run firm client stories, create customized pitches, build meaningful relationships with the local media, an incentive to monitor news and quantify their impact through the Muck Rack software for the client.

Choose the style of your 'media targets' based on the level of course you have; for 200-level we tend toward low-medium pressure targets (see below for levels). For 300 to 400-level courses we go for the high-pressure target - the actual media. This gives us an opportunity to both network and practice by syncing up with some of our fave community mentors.

For this activity you will need audiences for pitches, a large open space that you are able to cluster seating arrangements, or at minimum provide a 1:1 setting for an audience member and a student; or Zoom and breakout room access. PR students have three minutes with the audience targets selected to introduce themselves, share a bit about their organizations/clients and to pitch away for their in-class client. These three-minute meetings go fast - which means preparing students ahead of time with a plan becomes important to success and meaningful feedback.

Before the speed pitching you should equip your students with:

1. A thorough understanding of theory as described in GIFT rationale
2. A thorough understanding of media ethics and PR ethics (Ward et al., 2020)
3. Students should be thoroughly briefed on the State of Journalism (Muck Rack, 2020a)
4. Instruction on and practice of crafting a newsworthy press release using AP style (Purdue Owl, n.d.)
5. Students should write up a client press release on something newsworthy
6. Students should use Muck Rack or manually create a local media list based on client activity (Muck Rack, n.d.-a) - from this you should attempt to recruit your speed pitching media member line up
7. Students should create an emailable pitch they will base this exercise on; pitching in person this newsworthy idea to local media (Muck Rack, 2020b)

After the 'Meet the Media Speed Pitching' activity:

1. Students should craft a follow up email for the media they engage with using the Nine Media Pitching Tips Directly from Journalists advice from Spin Sucks (Joffe, 2020).
2. Your class should also publicly thank your local media for their time

and efforts as well as like, follow, share when possible their bylines to foster a longstanding relationship

Possible Audiences for Pitches:

Low Pressure	Medium Pressure	High Pressure
Pitch peers in class	Pitch your PRSA chapter	Pitch THE actual local media in person
Pitch peers on Zoom	Pitch university student-led media	Pitch THE actual local media on Zoom
Pitch peers in a news writing class	Pitch program alumni volunteers	

Appendix B Media & Professor Feedback Rubric

Speed Pitching Rubric & Assignment
PROFESSOR | COURSE | SEMESTER YEAR

CLIENT: ____________________________________
STUDENT NAME(S): ___________________________

	Advanced – 10	**Proficient – 8, 9**	**Basic – 7, 6**	**Needs Improvement – 5, 4, 3, 2, 1**
Press Release	Clearly focused, thoroughly presented the topic; immediately and efficiently articulates the issue or failure.	Focused and thorough; engages the audience in the topic.	Vague; does not immediately engage the audience in the topic. Is play-by-play; not an assessment.	Unfocused and rambling; confuses the reader. Lacks structure of introduction of issue or modeling.
Pitch Write Up Structure	Well-developed point, assesses situation, formulates a strategy based on 2 models appropriately selected, suggestions as to why or why not successful; provides recommendations based on models and evidence.	Well-developed point, clear conclusion. Meets minimum guidelines, does not go above and beyond in articulation nor logic/research. Lacks detail or effort.	Some elements are lacking or not adequately developed. No clear conclusion. Missing key points or lacks articulate logic, research, or missing any other components.	Write up is disjointed and may be difficult to follow. No clear point or clear conclusion. Lacks clarity of thought and organization.
Pitch Write Up Tone/Professionalism	Highly appropriate tone, matches intent of the piece, enhancing readers experience and understanding.	Appropriate tone consistently maintained throughout the piece.	Inconsistent tone or tone not maintained throughout the piece.	Tone is completely inappropriate or professionalism not present.
Pitch Write Up Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling	Consistently follows AP Style. Uses completely appropriate grammar that helps readers understand meaning. No errors in punctuation. All words spelled correctly, helping readers clearly understand the central idea.	Consistently uses AP Style. Uses appropriate grammar that does not interfere with meaning. A few punctuation errors. Most words are spelled correctly.	Uses AP Style inconsistently. Grammar choices sometimes confusing. Many or major errors in punctuation that sometimes confuse the reader. There are many spelling errors that sometimes make it hard for readers to understand the central idea.	Uses AP Style inconsistently, or not at all. Grammar choices keep readers from understanding the piece. Frequent and/or major errors that obscure meaning. There are frequent spelling errors that make it hard for readers to understand the central idea.

Speed Pitching Rubric & Assignment
PROFESSOR | COURSE | SEMESTER YEAR

CLIENT: ____________________________________
STUDENT NAME(S): ___________________________

Core Six: Timeliness, Impact, Prominence, Proximity, Conflict and Human Interest	Core Six are observed consistently, appropriately with sound logic, evidence, and has obviously used research to solidify ideation and creation.	Core Six are observed inconsistently, has a few logic flaws, uses research sparingly or inappropriately, modeling not explored meaningfully or accurately.	Core Six are observed inconsistently or not at all, suffers logic flaws, lacks research, lacks meaning or evidence.	Core Six are not applied correctly, lacks logic, research, meaning, and evidence.
Pitch Statement Written	Appropriate and thorough. No errors.	Appropriate, but not thorough. Some errors.	Thorough, but not appropriate. Some errors.	Not appropriate, nor thorough. Many errors.
Pitch Statement Delivered - Question Responses	Clear and concise. Doesn't patronize. Nonverbals are professional. Leads with empathy. Tells the truth. Owns the situation. Answers questions truthfully and pursuant to the situation in a knowledgeable manner.	Clear and concise. Doesn't patronize. Nonverbals are professional. Leads with empathy. Tells the truth. Owns the situation. Struggles to answer questions truthfully and pursuant to the situation in a knowledgeable manner.	Major inconsistencies in: Statement. Engagement with audience. Nonverbals. Empathy. Truth/Facts. Answers to questions.	Not clear and concise. Patronizes audience. Nonverbals are unprofessional. Doesn't lead with empathy. Unable to answer questions truthfully and/or pursuant to the situation in a knowledgeable manner.
Participation/Preparation	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Needs Improvement
Overall Quality from Student(s)	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Needs Improvement
Speed Pitching Reflection Essay	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Needs Improvement

FINAL GRADE: __________/ 100

Speed Pitching Rubric & Assignment **CLIENT: ______________________________________**
PROFESSOR | COURSE | SEMESTER YEAR **STUDENT NAME(S): ___________________________**

Meet The Media Speed Pitching

Before Meet the Media Event Day:

1. Using a press release constructed in class for your client news and keeping in mind models from chapters and prep we did in class regarding theory, in your pitching group, or on your own, use Muck Rack to develop or manually pull a local media list to meet the needs of your client news. You can find tips and tricks for both here: https://muckrack.com/media-database-guide . If you need a sample template to start one from scratch try this one: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Qo-dT1Rn50IVUQmhiPPrY9FMCJ-3Msa6b0kiMJNja9I/edit#gid=1003667026
2. For each journalist that you have chosen, develop a custom pitch of your newsworthy potential story by taking into consideration the media member's audience and previous article authorship align this audience to your client need to develop an angle from which to pitch your chosen member of local media. Find some tips on how to develop a successful pitch from your lecture notes and from here: https://spinsucks.com/communication/media-pitching-tips/, https://info.muckrack.com/guide-to-pr-pitching-2020 or https://blog.justreachout.io/media-pitch/ there are no shortage of blogs discussing pitching best practices.

During Meet the Media Event Day:

3. Your professor has recruited 9-12 members of media from your local media lists to whom you will use the pitch you developed on paper and move it into an event where you will be given three minutes to pitch using the technique based on the written pitch, a verbal pitch and answer follow up questions regarding your client's potential story. For this in-person activity, be sure to research each member of media and see if or how you can align your client news with the member of the media in order to attempt earning media coverage by way of a verbal pitch. Remember from our media kit workshop, that personalized media pitching yield happier returns for everyone. Please use the rubric associated with this assignment to anticipate what the members of media will be evaluating for your pitch.
4. After time is called, you will rotate to the next member of the media for your next pitch. Be sure to have your notes accessible in order to modify anything you need for your next media member. There will be roughly 2 minutes between pitches for you to recover, recoup, and make notes. After 1 round of 3 pitches, there will be a 15 minute media break – we will do this 2 or 3 times, depending on how efficient we are in moving and recovering between pitches. At the 15 minute media breaks, please network with fellow classmates and members of the media. Relationship building is among the top of successful media and communicator attributes.

After Meet the Media Event Day:

5. Following the pitching experience, please write up a one page reflection (500-800 words) on your experience. How did you feel? What would you change about your pitching strategy? Did anything change from your first pitch to your last pitch? Would you want to work in media relations? Tell me everything! 😉 You may turn your essay in on BlackBoard under the discussion board under "Speed Pitching Reflection."
6. Next, please take the time to either email or handwrite a thank you note to the members of media you engaged with today, this is important as you build your network. Gratitude is always a good idea.

Appendix C Photos of Speed Pitch Event 2019

Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 203-212

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2021

A Human-Centered SEO Approach to Creating Higher Ranking Content for Public Relations using a Content Clustering Method

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Editorial Record: This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 19, 2021 deadline. JPRE invited top GIFTs authors to submit to JPRE by June 18, 2021. First published in September 2021.

Rationale

The most successful PR practitioners know that writing is an essential skill that helps build relationships with various target audiences including reporters, influencers, and customers. As PR educators, it is our responsibility to prepare our students with the necessary writing skills to thrive in a digitally driven environment. To that end, it is critical we teach the importance of using search engine optimization (SEO) and artificial intelligence (AI) when developing content. This assignment teaches students how to optimize content for search engines using content clustering and the PESO Model.

One of the underlying principles of our work in content creation is to consider the idea of how SEO works in relation to what and why people are searching online. This is to understand the searcher's intent and to make it easier for them to find what they are searching for. AI plays an important role in this process. We have seen AI find its way into customer service, online search and more recently the crafting of articles. These advances give rise to a new phenomenon for communicators: “content intelligence” (Fu et al., 2020). Brandon Andersen (2016), chief strategist at Ceralytics, defines content intelligence as “the science of identifying and predicting the content topics and themes that provide the most value to your audiences. It answers the question, ‘What content should I write?’” (para. 1).

Content intelligence focuses on high-value content creation and the hyper-targeting of audiences. Current research would suggest one of the most challenging tasks of SEO experts and copywriters is creating or maintaining the balance between the creative element, search optimization, and connecting with a target audience (Fu et al., 2020). In today’s digitally expanding environment, we must teach our students how to develop content using SEO, keyword techniques and AI.

Student Learning Goals

1) Develop a content creation strategy based on the importance of internet search, SEO, and AI; 2) Learn how to use and implement the content map.

Connection to PR Practice and/or Theory

With this in mind, we present the content cluster strategy and activity (Appendix A). Content clusters are a relatively new concept in SEO content strategy. A content cluster approach adopts topic modeling and internal linking to improve the human-centered user experience of content to boost search performance. Using Google’s website quality standards “E-A-T” (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) in addition to “YMYL” topics (Your Money, Your Life) this assignment uses search algorithms to develop a series of articles around the same topic or theme (Shepard, 2020). With audience search intents in mind, this GIFT is structured to teach students how to develop content using the content clustering model by implementing SEO and AI principles (Appendix B/C) (Dietrich, 2021).

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

After completing this exercise together, the class engages in discussions to connect the premise behind search and AI, the incorporation of the PESO Model, and students' own content development experiences. Students are excited to talk about their process. Overall, students felt this lesson helped them understand more clearly how to develop better content. They commented that the lesson put the course material into context. Beyond the theoretical and moving into the applicable, this assignment allows students to apply the material they learned to their own content creation by putting into practice the content cluster model.

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Appendix A: Assignment

This lesson is taught as part of a unit on creating targeted messaging with key audiences in mind. Once the instructor has discussed the type of content students will be developing, it's time to shift gears and discuss the content plan using content clustering driven by SEO and AI.

First, think of clusters as networks of related content. Like a mind map or a concept map (Novak & Musonda, 1991), both popular graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge. In the center or at the top is your organization's main topic. The main topic should be the most important keyword or phrase found in the content creation exercise. This could be narrow or broad in scope. From here, branch out to related subtopics and again into supportive topics. As the map begins to fill in, the final circles are "where the content lives." This could be a blog, but it also could be an Instagram, Twitter feed, TikTok account, or website any form of media from the PESO Model (Dietrich, 2020).

Teaching students the content cluster method helps them distinguish the relationship between ideas. Students should be able to differentiate how their ideas fit together, paying particular attention to where there is an abundance of ideas. Here is an example for the following goal: create a content cluster for visiting San Diego using the PESO Model Content

Map.

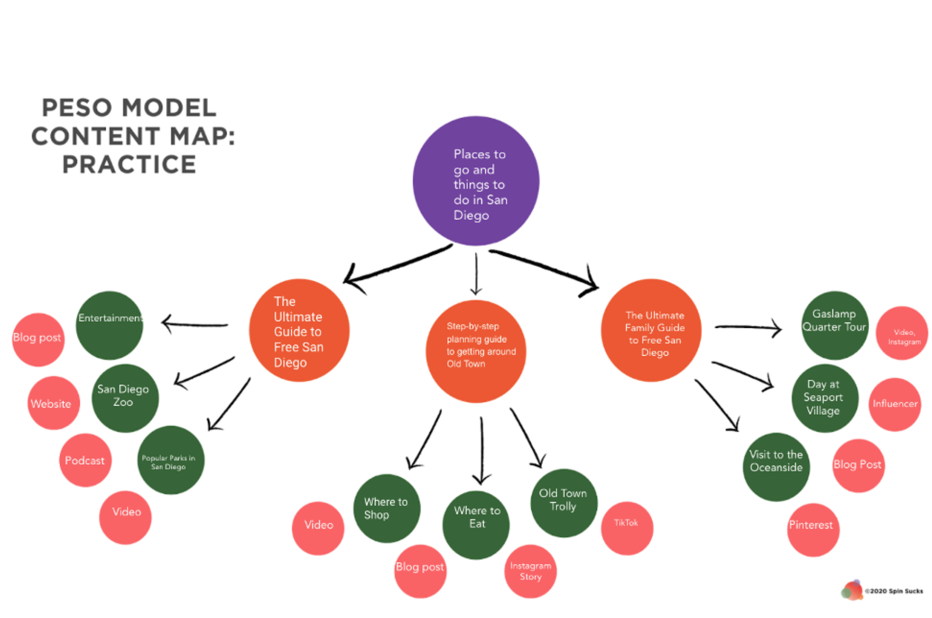
Exercise/Activity: For this example, our main topic is places to go and things to do in San Diego.

Content creation always begins with building a comprehensive list of keywords. Content clusters are a series of behaviorally constructed rationales that are used to develop and deliver meaningful content based on keyword strategy (Luttrell & Masiclat, 2019). The parameters are established on Google's search intents – I want to know, I want to go, I want to do, I want to buy. As an example, the professor offers this: *if I'm a tourist and I'm planning a trip to San Diego I might search "Where should we go in San Diego?" or "What is there to do in San Diego?*"

First, instruct your students to develop a searchable list of keywords by conducting basic Google searches of core keywords surrounding the topic of San Diego. For each search, read the top five URLs to pull out related keywords and concepts. An important aspect to this exercise is to pay significant attention to the "related searches'' keywords at the bottom of Google's search engine results page (SERP). These related searchers give a glimpse into the minds of what others are searching. In the same way that Amazon provides customers with "frequently bought together" or "other customers purchased'' help, students understand the related searches box is performing in the same way. By using algorithms and the science of AI, Google is essentially providing topics that are important and relevant to these search parameters.

Using the example of the tourist visiting San Diego the instructor lists possible search questions: "Where should we go in San Diego?" and "What is there to do in San Diego?"

In this example, the instructor has used both the “do” and “go” search parameters of Google. When one searches “San Diego + Things to Do” they get results that include La Jolla, at night, with kids, Old Town. By adding “October” to our search we’ve constricted our search further and then receive results that include “festivals,” “events” and “fall.” Asking where we should “go” provides results including “events,” “free,” “San Diego Zoo.” By digging deep, we can see people are searching for events related to parades, festivals, and even Legoland.



Here is a list of the three content clustering ideas based on this search:

Content Idea 1

The Ultimate Guide to Free San Diego

Content Idea 2

The Ultimate Family Guide to Free San Diego

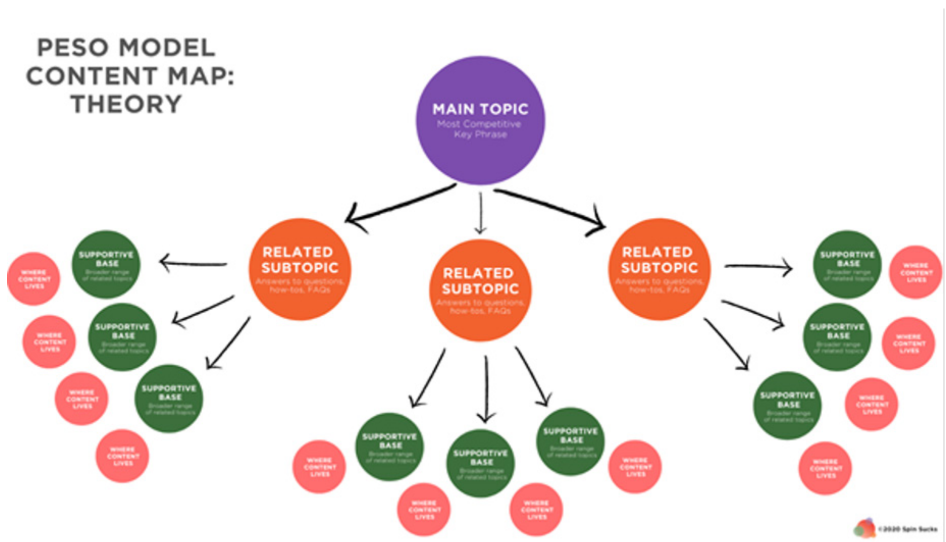
Content Idea 3

Step-by-step planning guide to getting around Old Town

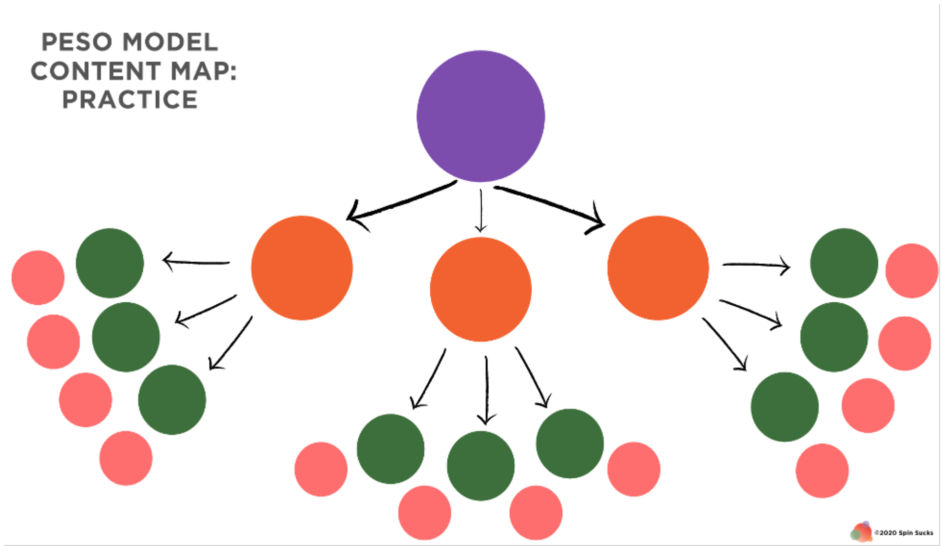
- Where to shop
- Where to eat
- Old Town Trolly

Using the PESO Model Content map, in building out content idea 3, you can see that our activity branched out into the content topics of where to shop, where to eat, and the Old Town Trolly. The final bubbles in the content cluster map illustrate where content will be shared and promoted. This could include websites, videos, or social media channels.

Appendix B: Peso Model Content Map Theory



Appendix C: Peso Model Content Map Practice



Journal of Public Relations Education
2021, Vol. 7, No. 2, 221-228

PRD GIFT Winner AEJMC 2021

Teaching Audience Analysis Through Worksheets: Approaching Audience Analysis as Qualitative Research

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Editorial Record: This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 19, 2021 deadline. JPRE invited top GIFTs authors to submit to JPRE by June 18, 2021. First published in September 2021.

Rationale

You are a new employee, and your boss has an important meeting soon. She requests a brief informing her on a new client, an environmentally friendly lawn care company. This brief is an "Audience Analysis," a common task in strategic communication. Audience analysis involves researching an organization, its context, goals and challenges. While public relations faculty are familiar with audience analysis and its role in strategic planning, what may be less well understood is that students need the "*how*," or procedures for systematic audience analysis. That is, students should learn audience analysis as *qualitative research employers can review for thoroughness and accuracy*. Unfortunately, these skills are under-taught.

Student Learning Goals

Science students may never study communication in their coursework, and fewer are taught to approach audience analysis in a disciplined manner. In addition, communication students learn about audience analysis, but may not be taught a systematic approach. To remedy this deficit, many universities are now offering courses in science communication as well as courses in communication strategy. These courses often involve projects helping real clients. Students enroll from a variety of backgrounds and know *what* they want to accomplish, but not *how*. One of the "how's," rarely taught in scientific contexts, is systematic audience analysis. Professionals skilled in systematic audience analysis are needed in government, nonprofits, and for-profits.

Connection to Public Relations Theory and/or Practice

Theory and practice show clients are most helped when practitioners understand and address their goals and challenges (Botan, 2018; Brunner, et al., 2018; Lutrell & Capizzo, 2019; Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2013). Students can assist clients when they internalize "procedural knowledge" needed for thorough audience analysis. As Hillocks (1986) established, using experiments and meta-analysis, teaching students *what* we instructors want is inadequate. Focus should also be on procedural knowledge. Helping students understand what we want them to produce is useless without engaging them in *how* to do it (p. 240).

Evidence of Student Learning

We studied two strategic campaigns classes and two classes in communicating science to decision makers. In each, some students worked with environmentally engaged clients such as an environmentally friendly lawn care company or the U. S. National Park Service. In three of the four classes, students completed a systematic worksheet for audience analysis. In the fourth, they followed a detailed assignment that tapped social science theory to analyze the client's request. Students received feedback on the thoroughness and accuracy of their analyses prior to meeting clients. Fifteen students were interviewed. Overall, they said disciplined audience analysis was enlightening and helpful. One science student said: "I just wouldn't have thought to research my audience. . . I didn't really think about . . what they value." A communication student said: "Some . . . questions [on the worksheet] would not be things we would be thinking . . [and thinking] . . about the audience . . can spark ideas."

The Assignment

We append the *Qualitative Research Approach to Audience Analysis Worksheet* along with references. In the worksheet, students provide a concise sum of their findings following each set of questions. An environmentally friendly lawn care company is used as an example.

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Appendix

Qualitative Research Approach to Audience Analysis Worksheet

This assignment presents audience analysis as a procedure for qualitative research. It uses a planning worksheet. In this illustration, an environmental lawn care company is the client.

Students sum findings, and insert them after each question, which encourages conciseness. Instructors review completed worksheets for accuracy and thoroughness before students interview their client. These steps help students confirm their understanding of the client's request and consider initial proposals.

1. Client Basics
Students identify the standard and publicly available information about the environmental lawn care company. This baseline information includes, but is not limited to, organization name, address, contact information, or hours of operation. This information is summarized here.

2. What and Why
After compiling basic information, students learn the motivations or goals of the environmental lawn care company. What do they do and how do they function? How are they different from other lawn care companies? Brief examples or stories are helpful here.

3. Public/Audiences
Students identify the internal and external audiences for this company. Internal audiences might include employees. External audiences for the environmental lawn care company might include existing clients or investors, local environmental and gardening experts, extension agents,

and governmental authorities monitoring drought, flooding, wetlands, or water quality.

4. Client and Stakeholders by the Numbers
Students find statistical ways of characterizing the audience. This may take the form of "likes" on social media, number of employees, or financial indicators, depending on what is most applicable for the environmental lawn care company. Other "numbers" could include years in business, annual sales, most requested services, and types of customers (type of residence, business, size of lot, distance from company to customer sites).

5. Competitive Environment
Students identify competitors and other organizations that offer similar services to the environmental lawn care company, How does the company compare and why? What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?

6. Trends, Issues
What are the trends impacting the environmental lawn care company? What issues affect how business is conducted? Are there tax incentives for certain uses of land? Regulations about wetlands, flood plains? Incentives for planting native trees and flowers? Incentives for reducing fertilizer? Supporting pollinators? Discouraging deer, geese, or pests naturally? Replanting lawns with wild prairie grasses or flowers? Xeriscaping?

7. Past, Present, Future
What's the story of the environmental lawn care company? How did it get started? How has it developed? Why is it important that it is an *environmental* lawn care company, and what are the company's future prospects, plans, goals, and interim objectives?

8. Humanize, Values
Humanize this company by learning its stories. Is the company socially responsible and how? Is the company trusted by customers and other publics? Do the owners and employees have community involvements?

9. Communication/Media Audit
Students seek publicly available data, or, if the client makes this possible, they seek data from private, paid sources. They should ask, what media have covered or could cover the company and why? When and how is the environmental lawn care company mentioned in news media? Is that coverage *ad hoc* or planned? What further media coverage -- and by which outlets -- would be most beneficial to the company's goal? Does the company have a website? What social media metrics are available? What are they? Do customers and prospective customers use the same social media outlets or others? Is the business featured in news shared by gardening clubs, homeowners' associations, retirees, schools, and universities?

10. Summarize Conditions Prompting Client Interest in Strategic Communication
Describe why the environmental lawn care company is seeking communication assistance at this time. Why is this important to them?

11. Summarize Client's Communication Goal
Place a concise statement of what you think this client most wants here.

12. Behaviors Client Wants to Influence
What does the company most want? Increased sales of expensive but environmentally beneficial services such as replanting wooded areas or xeriscaping? Relationships with large clients such as local universities or

large businesses? What individual, social, political, and environmental factors affect the chances of creating *enduring* change among customers and the services they seek? Consider tax incentives or political changes. What steps might incentivize *short-term* behavioral change such as discounts?

More Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

A number of interviewed students said completing the audience analysis worksheet was helpful. Said one student about the value of disciplined audience analysis:

> "[The class required] you . . . to be prepared before you start[ed] a task or project. If you're not prepared, you're going to be spending a lot of time to fill in those gaps."

This student also said completing the worksheet assisted her in producing written products:

> "It should be seamless. It should be, oh, the information's right here, take that and transfer to the project at hand. Like if it's a press release, who's my intended audience? Let me look at the sheet so super useful tool to have."

In addition, one instructor said the precision and detail of students' responses to the worksheet was a good indicator of the effectiveness of their proposals for their clients:

> "[A] detailed worksheet produces a better plan or proposal. And so, the weaker the worksheet, the weaker the proposal, because if this [the worksheet] is imprecise, . . . [the plan] isn't going to have great ideas. Or it may have great ideas, but it may have nothing to do with what this [the problem] is."

Looking back over several years of teaching, this instructor also reported that students who learned to complete audience analysis worksheets thoroughly, through repeated practice and feedback, have done well professionally:

> "They've . . . been promoted . . . they're doing fantastic."