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Editorial Staff

Note from the Editor-in-Chief:

Featured in this issue are three articles which all center around different perspectives of public relations programs. The first two focus on alumni and student perspectives, with the students being HBCU students weighing in on their perspectives of graduate programs. The third article examines Ph.D. programs based on a content analysis of publicly available program information, and does so with an eye on moving the graduates into faculty lines.

The teaching briefs, as usual, provide excellent ideas for approaching classes ranging from using an international case study to teach race and cultural sensitivity in public relations, idea for crisis classes, and a business model for a public relations firm which could be adapted for classes as well.

Our next issue is a special edition focuses on activism, and if you have not seen the call for the fall special issue on mentorship, leadership and DEI, please check it out! These are due the first of June.

https://aejmc.us/jpre/2021/10/13/special-issue-call-for-papers-leadership-mentorship-and-dei-in-the-post-pandemic-public-relations-classroom/

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Public Relations Graduates' Perceptions of Their Degrees and Careers: A Five-University Study

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ABSTRACT

The numbers of public relations majors and available positions in the field continue to rise. However, many public relations alumni continue to have challenges finding these positions in the field and some choose to leave the profession after working in the field. Findings from this public relations' alumni survey explored the reasons why students major in public relations, the challenges to secure employment in the field upon graduation, and why they leave or stay in the profession. There were significant differences between gender in a variety of areas. Overall, just over one-third of respondents said they definitely or probably expected to spend their professional careers in public relations, but about three-fourths of those surveyed expressed satisfaction toward their degrees and the public relations profession. Educators and practitioners should work together more closely to train students who can successfully enter and remain in the public relations profession.

Keywords: perceptions of public relations degrees, curriculum, perceptions of public relations, perception of degrees, public relations alumni

Special Editorial Note: The authors dedicate this paper to the memory of our amazing colleague, Judy VanSlyke Turk. Thank you, Judy, for your insight, talent, and collaboration. We will miss you.

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Dedication

We dedicate this paper to the memory of our amazing colleague, Judy VanSlyke Turk.Thank you, Judy, for your insight, talent, and collaboration. We will miss you.

Ken, Gemma, John, and Brad

Public relations has grown in virtually all facets in recent years, including opportunities in the profession and related fields, college degree programs, and numbers of classes. Many studies have been conducted on perceptions of the field by practitioners, educators, and students. However, few studies have specifically targeted alumni in public relations and focused on degree and career satisfaction and suggestions for curriculum improvements that could lead to enhancements for the profession. Many graduates of public relations programs never work in the public relations profession or leave the field. The major focus of this study is on public relations alumni perceptions of their education and professional experience, and this study includes responses from alumni in and out of the field to fill in some gaps in the research. This expansive survey research is based on a longitudinal study completed over the course of three years that initially started with focus groups and interviews.

Literature Review

Social Exchange and Identity Theories' Application to PR Students and Alumni

Social exchange researchers have explored the connection between people's motivation to obtain a reward in exchange for something of value (Homans, 1961), whether it be tangible or intangible. Additional studies have concluded that motivation of expected returns will impact an individual's voluntary actions (Blau, 1964). Levine et al. (2010) stated that for the most part people are satisfied with their relationships when the rewards exceed the cost, and they continue in those relationships where investments lead to projected growth. In turn, what results is commitment forming between the exchange partners of employers and employees (Lawler et al., 2000).

Social exchange research expanded to real-world interactions including students and universities (Yucel-Aybat et al., 2018), as well as employer and employee exchanges (de Jong et al., 2009; Eisenberger et al., 1986). One study found that college students were motivated to choose a specific major based on factors they value most including personal value, interests, pay, interest, and ability to do the coursework, career activities, and job availability/location (Wright, 2018). Another study found that employees' motivation stems from the opportunity to develop exchange relationships with organizations through organizational support and leader member exchange (Wayne et al., 1997). Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) argued that those perceptions correlate with employees' commitment to the organizations for which they work.

Additionally, social identity researchers (Fiske & Ruscher, 1993) noted that social identity theory explicates that individuals categorize other individuals into in-groups and out-groups based on such criteria as ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, occupation, or the like and such organized groups provide individuals with meaning (Amiot et al., 2007) and a sense of belonging (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Students and employees who study public relations belong to a group of individuals with a similar social identity, but as other studies (Cialdini et al., 1976; Crisp et al., 2007) established, self-categorization can decrease or increase motivation and emotion depending on the social group's successes or failures.

Perceptions and Attitudes of Public Relations Students

Various studies have considered perceptions of public relations students, including their roles as leaders in the field and future professionals (Duffy et al., 2012; Gallicano et al., 2012; Quesenberry, 2016). In 2005, Sha and Toth stated at the time that "very little research" had analyzed students' views on future careers (p. 94). They found that 62.6% of students in public relations thought they would be working in public relations 10 years after graduating. Many respondents also expressed a major interest in work-life balance, including flexible working hours. These authors emphasized the necessity to "demystify" the public relations workplace that is "even critical, to the survival of our field" (p. 99).

Other authors have studied student attitudes toward careers that indicated 60% expected to be promoted within a year of starting to work, and over half said they would counsel top management in their ideal jobs (Farmer & Waugh, 1999). Additional studies have reviewed student perceptions toward the profession in general before they entered the field (DeRosa & Wilcox, 1989; Morton, 1989). In a more recent related study (Fullerton & McKinnon, 2012), a nationwide survey of college students who are members of Public Relations Student Society of America chapters found a mix of attitudes and perceptions of the public relations industry. A large majority of students believed their college degrees had prepared them well for a career in public relations. Yet, many were still concerned about finding a job after graduation. A third-person effect was detected in that students believed that the negative media portrayals of the PR industry had more effect on others than it did on them.

Job Satisfaction in the Public Relations Field

Researchers have addressed job satisfaction of those working in public relations, regardless of educational background and time in the profession. Various scholars have analyzed overall career satisfaction, especially related to communication and commitment to careers (Duffy et al., 2012; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Pincus, 1986; Pincus et al., 1990; Wolniak & Pascarella, 2005).

Kang (2010) studied conflicts in public relations careers with a focus on ethics and found that ethical problems link directly to job dissatisfaction. Other studies have considered millennials working in public relations. Gallicano et al. (2012) found that these young workers were generally satisfied with their positions. Blum and Tremarco (2008) discovered a link between job satisfaction and employees' perceptions of whether organizations were following their corporate values. These researchers emphasized the importance of employees feeling connected to the employer through shared values.

Multiple studies have examined job satisfaction differences between males and females working in public relations (Park, 2003; Serini et al., 1997, Wright et al., 1991). In the latest research above, Park (2003) conducted a survey of 40 questions focusing on self-perceptions. Regarding opportunity equity for different genders, the study found no occupational consensus between government and corporate practitioners. However, government practitioners emphasized gender equity more than corporate practitioners. In addition, women in corporate organizations were less satisfied with their salaries and opportunities for advancement than men, but there was no difference in this immediate aspect in government organizations.

Rupprecht (2011) examined work satisfaction of practitioners and developed focus areas of personal growth, recognition, community, trust, and respect. This was a qualitative and phenomenological study looking at composite textual and structural descriptions of phenomena. Rupprecht found that the leader of an organization sets the tone and had great impact on the happiness of employees. Participants also were happier if they felt they made a difference and they were respected and valued for their contributions. Participants also enjoyed feeling part of a team and had a sense of community in a workplace where people could connect to one another. They also thrived in an autonomous workplace where there was a spark to creativity, passion, and excitement as well as experiencing personal growth in the variety and types of work they were engaged in.

Satisfaction with the College Degree

Various studies have considered degree satisfaction of alumni. Pike (1993) found that satisfaction with college was positively correlated to later perceived learning. Pike (1994) later found that college satisfaction also was related to work experiences and career satisfaction. Still another related study concluded that alumni who were satisfied overall with their college experience expressed satisfaction with classroom experiences and social situations (Sanusi, 2007). Another group of researchers found a relationship between graduates' perceptions of employment preparation and their degree satisfaction. This satisfaction may also positively impact later donations (Martin et al., 2000). Others expressed broadly that alumni surveys and input can provide very useful information for educators related to college experiences and preparation for work (Cabrera et al., 2005).

Satisfaction with the Public Relations Degree

Very few scholars have investigated specifically the satisfaction of alumni with public relations degrees. Rybacki and Lattimore (1999) expressed that program assessment for public relations programs should definitely include alumni surveys and other related sources. Almost half of those included in this study said they used alumni surveys as part of their assessment programs. Richardson (1993) surveyed alumni from the University of Tennessee, which included some communication majors. Generally, they were satisfied with their educational experiences related to developing cultural understanding, verbal skills, and social skills. Todd (2012) studied the perspectives of millennial communication graduates based on their job skills and professionalism. Most of these respondents perceived themselves as above average or even outstanding. The annual survey of graduates from communication programs conducted by Becker et al. (2012) focused on job satisfaction, salary, and post-graduation employment. About two-thirds were glad they had chosen to major in journalism or communication, and about one-fourth regretted the choice of major. Approximately 60% felt adequately trained for the job market (including having updated professors and courses with appropriate skills taught), but just under 28% expressed regret on their career choice. This study provided some specific details on public relations graduates: almost three-fourths were employed full time and the median salary was $33,000.

Public Relations, Advertising, and Other Communication-related Education

One study conducted by DiStaso et al. (2009) highlighted that both the numbers of public relations jobs and the amounts of money spent on public relations functions were increasing. The stature of the field also was growing within organizations. The public relations profession itself was becoming a more strategic function and involved more counseling and involvement in decision-making processes. In addition, training and leadership roles of the field were showing an increase, including focus areas of research and ethics implementation. The authors questioned whether degree programs were keeping up with these trends.

Opinions as to how well colleges and universities prepare new graduates for the public relations field are often determined by educators' understanding of the field in its current state. Studies indicate the vast majority of practitioners typically have earned a bachelor's degree: 94.5% (Rentner & Bissland, 1990) and 99% (DiStaso et al., 2009). Statista (2014) found that almost 52,000 degrees were awarded in journalism and mass communication programs in 2012-2013, with approximately one-quarter of the majors in public relations, advertising, or closely related areas or combinations. However, Todd's (2014) research showed that supervisors rate millennial students as having below average writing skills, with 38% of supervisors suggesting that students should be required to gain more writing practice prior to graduation. Again, this finding demonstrates the importance of educators understanding the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to prepare majors for potential success as they transition into the profession.

A general trend in communication education is toward specialized subfields within advertising and public relations education (Quesenberry, 2016). In fact, business leaders, educators, and students agree that specific knowledge is more important than being a generalist (Schelfhaudt & Crittenden, 2005). Neill and Schauster (2015) surveyed professionals in both advertising and public relations to discover what core skills are needed in practice and any gaps in education. They found the most common skills needed in the field are storytelling, business, strategic planning, presentations, math, and client relations. A common specialization for both fields is social listening and community management. Business skills for public relations and advertising students included statistics, financial documents, and budgeting as well as an understanding of business vocabulary and challenges. Regarding specialization, students need real-time technical training, strategic thinking, and problem-solving abilities through both theory and critical thinking courses. Technical skills in digital media were reinforced as a need in an earlier study by Kim (2012) that covered journalism, advertising, and public relations and characterized these broadly as digital media communications. This would now logically and obviously include the various uses of social media so prevalent in public relations practice.

From an advertising and business perspective, gender issues have also been a topic connected to education. McMillan (2016) found that women are most likely to be found in communication and least likely in business. This finding was confirmed in earlier research. Four different majors were investigated: advertising and public relations, marketing, English, and consumer sciences. Men were at their highest level at 62.5% in marketing and women were highest in consumer science at 81%. Women comprised 63.5% of undergraduate students in journalism and mass communication programs, which normally include public relations majors (Windels et al., 2010; Windels et al., 2013).

Many studies have been conducted focusing on educators' and practitioners' perspectives, but again few have been targeted toward graduates. Much research has been conducted on employers' expectations of public relations graduates entering the workforce (Brody, 1988; Brody, 1990; Wakefield & Cottone, 1987) and specifically on whether alumni were educated well enough in specific areas, including writing (Cole et al, 2009; Hardin & Pompper, 2004). Other studies have provided an overview of educator and practitioner educational priorities and perspectives, often highlighting differences in desired focus areas (Sohodol, 2010; Sriramesh & Hornaman, 2006; Stacks et al., 1999). Todd (2009) added in another study that public relations professionals generally value hands-on learning more highly than educators.

The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE, 2006; 2017) reported that practitioners and educators often agree on many areas that should be included in public relations degree programs. These two reports included recommendations for specific study in oral communication, writing, critical thinking, individual initiative, and overall positive attitude development. They added that business skills, behavioral science, global understanding, public relations ethics, technology use, and diversity also should be taught. Ragas et al. (2015) found in a study of Arthur W. Page senior communicators that understanding of various business areas was highly valued by employers and contributed to higher salaries for these public relations practitioners.

Need for Research on Perceptions of Public Relations Graduates

Few scholars have targeted their research efforts toward public relations graduates' perspectives on what should be included in degree programs. Gale and Bunton (2005) found that public relations and advertising alumni who completed ethics courses were more likely to consider ethical issues when they entered the workforce. In this study, 56% of those surveyed were working in communication, which was actually an increase from a previous study that showed 46.5% working in the field (Becker & Engleman, 1988).

Based on the literature reviews considering perceptions and attitudes of public relations students, job satisfaction in the public relations field, satisfaction with the college degree, and public relations education, the following research questions were developed. Gender differences were considered for all the research questions.

Research Questions:

RQ 1: What values of social exchange and social identity motivated alumni to complete a degree in public relations?

RQ 2: Where have public relations graduates worked since graduating and do they plan to continue their careers in the same field? If so, what successful social exchanges to include gender motivate them to stay in the practice?

RQ 3: For those who no longer work in public relations, why did they leave the practice, and would alumni recommend public relations degrees and careers to others who wish to identify personally and socially as a practitioner?

Method

Five faculty members, all representing different universities, started with focus groups of interviews with alumni from their individual programs. The results of that research were incorporated into one survey concentrating on the perceptions of public relations graduates concerning their degrees and the field. Graduates from each location were targeted directly by faculty at each location through individual email lists and alumni associations when possible. In addition, social media channels (including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter) were used to encourage broad participation in the study from targeted alumni. This was an online survey available to all alumni from any of the institutions through one link. The research started with interviews and focus groups in 2015 and extended to actual surveys after that -- with final analysis of data in 2020. Multiple follow-up messages were sent by researchers to enhance feedback. The survey was completed through Qualtrics, and Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from all five universities.

Forced-choice questions with rankings were included as well as qualitative open-ended questions. Multiple questions were the result of previous related research from focus groups and interviews conducted by the same researchers. Participants were given the opportunity in many instances to add qualitative extended comments to closed-ended questions.

Findings

Overall, 659 respondents completed the survey from all of the universities included. Of those indicating gender (n = 647), almost two-thirds were female (n = 412, 63.7%) and just over one-third were male (n = 235, 36.3%).

Based on the 644 who indicated their age, younger alumni tended to respond in this study. Ages 21-40 were listed by 463 (71.8%), while ages 41 and over were listed by 182 (28.3%).

For the 655 indicating their university, responses were as follows: Mountain West private university (n = 346, 52.8%), Southern public university #1 (n = 174, 21.9%), Mid-Atlantic private university (n = 57, 8.7%), Mid-Atlantic public university (n = 41, 6.3%), and Southern public university #2 (n = 37, 5.6%).

Just over a third had earned advanced degrees (n = 237, 36.0%). The top two graduate areas were identical in number of responses: master's in a communication-related field (n = 54, 22.8%) and MBA (n = 54, 22.8%). These were followed by JD (n = 26, 11.0%) and MPA (n = 25, 10.5%). (Percentages here are based on the 237 who indicated they completed a graduate degree).

Specific explanations are included for each research question below and based on applicable survey questions. Because of numerous responses on open-ended questions and multiple responses by many alumni, theme or sub-theme totals will not equal the total number of overall responses for each question. In addition, qualitative summary figures are estimated as close as possible and could be skewed slightly based on uncommon abbreviations, misspelled words, or similar response irregularities from respondents. Each open-ended segment of all questions was reviewed thoroughly by analyzing all responses and placing them in similar categories. In addition, percentages are based on responses for each question as well as broader themes.

RQ 1: What values of social exchange and social identity motivated alumni to complete a degree in public relations?

The first question in the survey was an open-ended inquiry of why respondents first chose to study public relations. A thematic analysis of the 632 responses indicated that many of the alumni were attracted because of the skill sets in the profession, including writing (n = 153, 24.2%), strategizing and planning 8.9% (n = 56), applying creativity, (n = 40, 6.3%), oral communication 5.5% (n = 35) and design (n = 19, 3.0%). Additionally, other respondents commented specifically on the diversity of jobs in the field (n = 7, 1.1%).

Many graduates (n = 86, 13.6%) indicated choosing the field because they liked working with people, were good with people, were attracted to persuading others, or the field seemed to fit their personality. Many respondents indicated they changed their college major to public relations from other areas they perceived to be a less appropriate fit, such as business in general (n = 73, 11.6%), journalism/news reporting (67, n = 10.6%) marketing (n = 41, 6.5%), broadcasting (n = 28, 4.4%), English (n = 16, 2.5%), advertising, (n = 14, 2.2%), and law (n = 14, 2.2%).

Public relations graduates were asked on a scale of 1 (not at all) to

5 (definitely) what factors motivated them toward completing the public relations degree. Respondents indicated dominant motivating factors were, in order of ranking: writing skills gained, enjoyed the classes, the broad application of the major to other fields, problem solving opportunities, and the diversity of public relations career choices. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Factors for Completing the Public Relations Degree Across Gender

	All (n = 650)		Females (n = 412)		Males (n = 235)		Independent Samples t-test		
Factors	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Writing skills gained	4.30	0.84	4.32	.835	4.26	.852	.933	641	.351
Enjoyed classes*	4.22	0.86	4.29	.838	4.08	.874	3.083	639	.002
Broad application to many other fields	4.01	1.09	4.04	1.070	3.97	1.102	.759	639	.448
Problem solving opportunities	3.95	0.99	3.96	.992	3.91	.994	.563	638	.574
Diversity of public relations career choices*	3.92	1.10	4.07	1.035	3.66	1.166	4.562	639	.000
Speaking skills gained	3.85	1.06	3.89	1.057	3.74	1.057	1.803	639	.072
Emphasis on relationships*	3.83	1.15	3.92	1.163	3.69	1.126	2.418	639	.016
Relationship of field to business	3.77	1.12	3.71	1.147	3.86	1.058	-1.554	6329	.121
Planning skills gained*	3.65	1.12	3.82	1.051	3.33	1.180	5.394	637	.000
Positive role of public relations in society*	3.45	1.14	3.57	1.143	3.23	1.119	3.589	635	.000
Research skills gained	3.22	1.14	3.26	1.152	3.13	1.086	1.423	635	.155
Layout and design knowledge*	2.87	1.24	3.02	1.230	2.59	1.197	4.274	635	.000
Travel opportunities in career*	2.87	1.29	3.00	1.296	2.62	1.234	3.601	633	.000
Group projects	2.67	1.25	2.69	1.261	2.62	1.223	.704	640	.482
High salary opportunities	2.49	1.09	2.50	1.093	2.47	1.087	.312	641	.755
Friends in major	2.36	1.33	2.40	1.381	2.29	1.262	1.063	639	.288
Other	3.68	1.88	3.53	1.741	3.88	1.650	-.753	54	.460

Females were more likely to rate numerous factors on degree completion higher than males overall. According to an independent sample t-test analysis, females rated the following factors higher: diversity of career, emphasis on relationships, enjoyed classes, layout and design knowledge, planning skills gained, positive role of public relations in society, and travel opportunities. Males only rated one factor higher, relationship of field to business, but it was not significantly higher. (See Table 1.)

RQ 2: Where have public relations graduates worked since graduating and do they plan to continue their careers in the same field? If so, what successful social exchanges to include gender motivate them to stay in the practice?

When asked to list the top five public relations jobs they hoped to gain after graduation, 74.5% identified corporate public relations and 73.7% identified agency/firm in their top five choices. Rounding out the top five choices were nonprofit/association (50.2%), special events (48.4%), and entertainment (39.4%). Working in government (n = 252, 38.2%) and university public relations (n = 248, 37.6%) were close behind. Several respondents did not intend to find a job in public relations: 93 selected this as their first option (14.1%), while 144 chose this option in their top five (21.8%). A t-test analysis found that males were more likely to prefer a starting job in corporations, $t(447) = 3.43$, $p < .01$, while females were more likely to prefer positions in fashion, $t(132) = 1.98$, $p = .05$, nonprofit, $t(325) = 4.31$, $p <. 001$, and special events organizations, $t(176) = 4.71$, $p <. 001$.

The first job after graduation was very often something not in public relations; 44.9% (n = 296) of respondents found jobs in other fields. For those whose first job was in public relations (n = 357), they were most likely in agencies/firms (n = 95, 32.1%), corporations (n = 63, 21.3%), or nonprofits/associations (n = 50, 16.9%). Another 8.4% of alumni went straight to graduate school (n = 25), and 12.5% (n = 37) identified an "other" position in public relations. Respondents selected job categories and the responses were cross tabulated by gender to identify differences. Because the data were categorical, a Chi-Square analysis was conducted and found that there were differences between where males and females found positions, $\chi 2$ (13, N = 646) = 37.39, p < .001. Specifically, males were more likely to find positions in corporations while females were more likely to find positions in government and nonprofit organizations.

Ultimately, 438 of the 659 respondents found employment in the field of public relations (66.5%). When the 93 respondents are subtracted who did not intend to look for a job in public relations, the percentage of those seeking jobs in public relations rises to 77.3%. The majority (n = 331) found a public relations position within a year (50.2% of all respondents, and 58.4% of those seeking public relations jobs). Another 56 (8.5% and 9.9% respectively) found a position by their second year, 38 (5.8%, 6.7%) between two and five years, and the remaining 13 (2.0%, 2.3%) after five years. At the same time, a majority of the respondents (n = 358, 63.9%) have held jobs other than public relations since graduation.

A minority of respondents in this study, 37.5% (n = 243), said they definitely or probably expect to spend their professional career in public relations. Of the 648 respondents to this question, 17.6% were unsure (n = 114), and 44.9% said they would probably not or definitely not spend their careers in public relations (n = 291). Females were significantly more likely to respond favorably about spending their careers in public relations, t(640) = 5.95, p < .001. More than 43% of females responded that they would definitely/probably continue their careers in public relations (n = 177), with 20% unsure (n = 82) and almost 37% responding definitely not or probably not (n = 150). Meanwhile, only 27% of males responded that they would definitely/probably continue their careers in public relations (n = 64), 13% were unsure (n = 30), and 60% indicated definitely not/

probably not (n = 139).

The alumni remaining in the public relations field (n = 270) primarily stayed because it was an enjoyable career, gave them a flexible career path, and they found opportunities for advancement. Making a lot of money and traveling were not as high on the list for motivating factors to stay in the field. Females, however, were significantly more likely to indicate traveling as a motivating factor, $t(253) = 2.35$, $p < .05$. (See Table 2.) Under the "other" category, respondents listed additional reasons such as the possibility of making a difference, using creativity in the job, and connecting with people.

Table 2

Motivations for Studying Public Relations

Motivations	1=Not at All	2	3	4	5=Definitely	Total Responses	Mean	SD
Enjoyable career	3	4	22	74	167	270	4.47	0.80
Flexible career paths	4	19	47	85	113	268	4.06	1.01
Opportunities for advancement	7	26	64	76	90	263	3.82	1.09
Financial opportunities	28	37	73	69	50	257	3.30	1.24
Travel opportunities*	55	44	61	47	51	258	2.98	1.42
Other	5	0	1	3	15	24	3.96	1.99

* Factor rated higher by females (t-test, p<.05)

RQ 3: For those who no longer work in public relations, why did they leave the practice, and would alumni recommend public relations degrees and careers to others who wish to identify personally and socially as a practitioner?

The most prevalent reason indicated for leaving the public relations profession (n = 259) was that respondents found career choices that were more preferable or paid better, or they could not find a public relations position. Other less important factors were limitations on geography, impact of significant others' career choices, boredom with the field, feminization of public relations, and being relieved of a position in public relations. (See Table 3).

Table 3

Determinants for Leaving Public Relations Profession Across Gender

	All Responses			Females			Males			Independent Samples t -test		
Determinants	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*-value
Like other career choices more**	281	3.92	1.37	149	3.77	1.440	129	4.10	1.243	-2.065	276	.040
More money in other field**	259	3.63	1.59	132	3.11	1.695	124	4.21	1.238	-5.916	254	.000
Could not find a public relations position*	246	3.26	1.67	140	3.46	1.642	103	2.98	1.680	2.214	241	.028
Geographic limitations led to few public relations opportunities*	211	2.58	1.57	117	2.81	1.608	91	2.26	1.467	2.534	206	.012
Significant other's career limited my public relations opportunities*	207	2.13	1.64	122	2.72	1.750	83	1.29	.982	6.764	203	.000
Bored in former public relations position**	214	2.01	1.44	114	1.82	1.287	98	2.22	1.557	-2.092	210	.038
Feminization of the field**	192	1.68	1.27	98	1.29	.799	92	2.04	1.489	-4.406	188	.000
Released from former public relations position	176	1.45	1.13	91	1.40	1.031	83	1.52	1.243	-.709	172	.479
Other	80	4.44	2.25	57	4.40	1.307	23	4.52	.994	-.390	78	.698

* Factor rated higher by males (t-test, p<.05)

Within the “other” category of why they left the field, there were 102 responses. The most popular was to be at home more with the family or to start a family (n = 39, 38.2%). Pursuing a graduate degree (n = 10, 9.8%) was listed as another reason some left the field. Others indicated they became disillusioned with public relations practice because what they found in the “real world” did not coincide with what they learned in college.

There were several significant differences between males and females on why they chose to leave the practice. A t-test analysis showed that males were more likely to leave because of other career choices, better paying jobs, being bored with their public relations position and the feminization of the field. Females were more likely to leave the field because they could not find a position, geographic limitations and significant other’s career limited their opportunities. (See Table 3.)

When asked if they would recommend a degree in public relations to college students, a vast majority (n = 489, 75.3%) of the 649 respondents for this question said they would. A relatively small number (n = 74, 11.4%) indicated they would probably not recommend or definitely not recommend the public relations degree.

While a minority of respondents expect to continue careers in public relations, a sizable majority of the 650 respondents on a separate question recommend it as a career path. A total of 70.3% (n = 457) would definitely recommend or probably recommend a public relations career to others entering college, while 13.7% (n = 89) would probably not or would definitely not recommend the career. Females were significantly more likely to recommend a public relations degree, $t(442) = 3.22$, $p < .001$, and a career in public relations, $t(456) = 4.03$, $p < .001$, according to a t-test analysis.

In a summary open-ended question, numerous alumni (n = 171) responded as to why they would or would not recommend public relations as a degree or career. Many alumni (*n* = 61, 35.7%) indicated in this open forum that they enjoyed their degrees and felt very prepared for work and related later activities. Many mentioned again the broadness of the degrees in public relations and the application to many other fields. Within these responses, some indicated the value of writing, speaking, strategic thinking, and other specific skills. This sentiment was especially true among respondents who were no longer working in public relations, as evidenced by these specific quotes:

- "While I am not still working in Public Relations, I still hold my degree and what I learned to be extremely valuable. It has allowed me to better understand the customer experience and to have valuable skills, especially writing skills, and I have been able to utilize that knowledge throughout my career."
- "Many of us majored in PR not because we wanted to be PR professionals (I never did), but because it was a good broadly applicable field of study that could serve as a springboard to a wide variety of grad programs or other careers."
- "As a wife and mother who worked as a newspaper editor for 10 years right out of college, then stayed home to run the family business, I found that Public Relations gave me a broad experience base that I have used for volunteer work and to support my husband's business. I have served on boards and committees in the community and have organized community-wide events which I am not paid for. My degree has been used constantly and consistently through the years. I understand the connection between people and tasks and how to manage the media. I am so glad that I majored in PR! I have developed and managed relationships and friendships with ethics and integrity. I believe that if I chose to work outside my home, I would have little problem getting a job. I have so many skills and understanding of how business and the community work."

Additional respondents (*n* = 23, 13.5%) indicated that business, marketing, or other related areas should be emphasized more in public relations curricula. Of those replying, many said they had ended up working in positions that were blended or included more specific business areas with public relations. This quote is representative of this sentiment: "I believe there is too much distinction between PR and other Comms/Ad/Branding/Marketing disciplines. Same goal . . . slightly different tools. I work, live and breathe in the space shared by ALL the MarCom fields . . . but don't consider myself working in PR."

Another segment of respondents (*n* = 19, 11.1%) stated that they were frustrated with their degrees, felt unprepared for work, or did not feel their educational backgrounds painted an accurate career picture. Many of these replies indicated that some of their perceived inadequacies were not understood until they entered the field. They expressed it would have been much better to know these challenges while still in school. Some of these respondents who expressed various frustrations still liked their degree programs overall.

Throughout the study in various questions, alumni indicated they would have liked more training and emphasis on social media. In fact, many of their titles listed (which is beyond the scope of this article) indicated social media or similar terms in their titles. However, many did express that social media was not in existence when they were in school. Additionally, dozens of alumni stated they learned the realities of public relations through internships, which often either cemented their major decisions or motivated them to pursue other areas. Others expressed that they either needed more internships while in school to understand the field or they needed more help from faculty and others locating appropriate internships.

Discussion

Three major themes emerged over the five-year period of the study and will be discussed more in-depth: why practitioners stay in the field, why they leave, and what directions this study suggests for public relations curricula. The three areas are obviously intertwined.

Why They Stay

The broadness of the public relations curriculum encourages some to stay in the field and others to leave. The study indicates that public relations may be perceived as a new general liberal arts program in many colleges. Educators and practitioners should determine if this broadness is positive or negative. Many alumni seem to be using the degree to hone writing, speaking, strategic planning, research, technology and other skills and knowledge that they then apply in other career fields. Many college students are simply striving to graduate and then decide what specific careers to pursue. Educators should consider that many of their students likely do not plan to pursue public relations careers at all, but they plan to use the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained in the degree to work in other fields. Practitioners should consider if it matters that that many of their current and future colleagues probably plan to work in other professions eventually, many of which are very related to public relations (but not specifically in the field).

Since many respondents seemed to enjoy the specific work in public relations positions overall, and others indicated job flexibility as a major advantage, employers should emphasize these elements when possible in recruiting and hiring for public relations positions. Within reason, practitioners should emphasize the enjoyment and impact of the work. In addition, employers providing flexible hours and more telecommuting might attract and keep quality practitioners who have other career options. However, the reality of often long hours and hard work should be explained as well to provide an accurate picture of the profession to reduce misperceptions as graduates enter the field.

Another major factor for those staying in the public relations field or planning to stay was that many alumni felt they could advance in the field. This perception should be emphasized more by employers to indicate that new employees will not be stuck in entry-level positions if they produce quality work. If there is hope for quick and important advancement, perhaps younger practitioners would stay in the field. Increased pay and potential broader supervisory roles incorporating public relations also could be emphasized.

Why They Leave

At first consideration, it would seem negative that many in this study did not plan to stay in public relations. Just 37.5% said they either definitely or probably would stay in the field. However, over 75% of respondents said they would definitely or probably recommend the public relations degree, and over 70% of alumni in this study said they would definitely or probably recommend working in the field. Apparently, most do not feel negatively toward the degree or the field; they apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained in public relations education and practice often to much broader career aspirations.

Naturally, challenges arise for practitioners and educators when many public relations graduates who have majored in public relations (and value the degree and career overall) leave for other opportunities they perceive will provide more advancement opportunities or enjoyment. Lawler and Yoon (1996; 1998) researched social exchange theory and concluded that frequent positive experiences have a long-term impact on creating feelings of relational cohesion and commitment. These social exchange experiences and feelings of cohesiveness, in turn, may influence a graduate's decision to remain with their current employer rather than pursue more profitable employment opportunities elsewhere. To decrease the number of alumni who leave the field, employers, educators, and entities creating public relations practitioner networks must find ways to strengthen favorable perceptions by public relations alumni of their social identity within the public relations sphere. Additionally, they must offer social exchange opportunities that will increase graduates' understanding of their role's relevance, the valuable contributions they make, and their sense of belonging within the public relations industry. Since just over one-third of the survey's respondents expressed a desire to stay in the field, public relations leaders and employers need to determine whether or not the actual human capital drain of losing talented practitioners is significant enough to be worth addressing.

Also, the disconnect between the large numbers of majors and the number of available positions in public relations should be considered by educators and practitioners. Public relations continues to be an academic growth area – because of all the tuition revenue it generates – but there should be enough jobs in public relations or closely related fields for graduates. Torossian (2011) cited public relations as the fastest growing communications segment. Another related challenge is that some of the jobs in public relations are being filled by those who did not study public relations. Educators need to work more closely with practitioners to better prepare exemplary public relations majors to be the prime candidates for these positions. Employers could also enhance professional development and growth to develop future leaders and address attrition.

Many alumni also indicated that public relations offers graduates the opportunity to enter the field, then "stop out" (especially to raise a family), and then possibly return to public relations employment. Some of these respondents indicated they planned to eventually return to the working world, possibly in public relations or a related field. This stop-and-start option could be viewed by educators and employers as a positive opportunity for certain types of employees, although the frequent turnover in positions potentially makes management much more complicated.

Differences Between Male and Female Alumni Responses

Overall, females were more enthusiastic about studying public relations and staying in the field. This result may not be too surprising considering the higher percentage of females studying and practicing public relations. Females rated several reasons at a higher rate for studying public relations than their male counterparts and were significantly more likely to stay in public relations as a career and were more likely to recommend studying public relations and public relations as a career choice.

The reasons for choosing to leave the practice suggest that males choose to leave for better pay, other career choices, and because they were no longer interested in the field. These reasons are consistent with other research on gender differences, particularly the trend to seek more money and more competitive jobs (Andsager & Hust, 2005). Females were more likely to respond that they left because they could not find the right position, geographic limitations, or because of the career of their significant other. The findings suggest that males often make the decision to leave based on their choices for careers and females are more influenced by other factors that are more outside their control. This finding could use more research to dig deeper into these preliminary results.

Curricular Updates

More than ever, public relations educators must understand what is necessary to prepare their graduates for gainful employment in public relations and related fields. Based on this study's findings, educators should think more broadly about career fields for which they can prepare students. Many public relations graduates will never work in or will leave the field, either by choice or accident; however, overall they value their education and feel prepared for numerous other careers because of their public relations degree.

Because many alumni eventually work in business-related fields (either as part of their public relations duties or in other positions), it is evident that business courses should be part of the public relations curriculum, either as requirements or electives. Marketing and management are two of the most obvious and often mentioned specific areas needed, but an understanding of finance, economics, and accounting has become necessary as public relations functions (especially at the highest levels) integrate with organizational business roles.

This study also suggests strongly that more curricular attention should be paid to emerging technologies, including social media, which from a communication management perspective should be led in organizations by public relations professionals with expertise in communication channel selection and analysis. Public relations educators must determine whether social media elements should be embedded throughout current classes, if these tools should be taught in separate classes, or if a blended approach should be implemented. In any case, overall technological and social media expertise for graduates must be made a high priority lest another field take the leadership role in managing organizations' social media programs.

Alumni stressed that writing still should be emphasized in public relations education. A love or enjoyment of writing encouraged many to enter the field, and they say the ability to write well in various formats often determines career success.

Alumni overwhelmingly emphasized that students should complete internships. Typically, those who interned were glad they did and said they should have done more, and those who did not intern wished they would have. Not only do internships provide work experience, portfolio materials, and potential job references, but these experiences also offer students a realistic view of the public relations workplace. Many respondents alluded to not knowing what the professional environment was like in certain types of organizations (such as firms/agencies or corporations) before entering the profession. Completing more internships in diverse areas of public relations practice would provide a more realistic view of where graduates feel they would best fit. In many cases, the work in the field is similar but the different venues impact career satisfaction greatly. For example, there is very often a different "vibe" or workplace culture at a health care institution versus a resort. The related overall stress levels are also often disparate in different industries.

Limitations

Although there were many respondents in this study, these only indicate perceptions of alumni from these five institutions. These programs all have well-developed sequences of required public relations classes and related student organizations. Characteristics may vary with a wider selection of colleges and different types of programs.

Even though some in the research team distributed the survey link via their university alumni association, there was still no viable method to reach all alumni from the five institutions. Any respondents were typically on an email list or connected to one of the professors (or other alumni) through social media. Additionally, the sample was skewed towards one university since almost half of the sample were from alumni of one of the universities.

Future Research

Another interesting follow-up study would be to determine if most professionals with public relations degrees who are not working in the field never intended to do so but have chosen another career field because they perceive there are few opportunities in public relations. Did they feel they could not have successful careers working specifically in public relations? Additional studies also could compare perceptions of alumni based on various detailed demographic factors, including gender, race/ethnicity, and different types of colleges. Researchers also might further explore work-life balance issues overall and how these benefits are addressed in workplace employee recruiting packages to specifically influence public relations practitioners' job satisfaction and longevity.

Perceptions of other professional groups concerning public relations should continue to be ascertained. In addition, additional study could be explored concerning those working in public relations, especially at the highest levels, who have no educational background and little direct professional experience in the field.

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Exploring HBCU Students' Interests in Pursuing Graduate Studies in Public Relations and Communication Programs

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ABSTRACT

This research responds to calls to support diversity and inclusion within the academic discipline of public relations specifically and in the communication discipline generally by engaging juniors and seniors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The authors conducted focus group interviews with students (*n*=22) at five HBCUs. This study addresses the extent HBCU students are aware of or are interested in pursuing graduate studies in the discipline, the barriers to application or entrance into public relations and communication graduate programs for Black students majoring in a communication discipline at HBCUs, and the strategies, tactics, programs, or initiatives that are useful for the successful placement of Black undergraduates into graduate public relations and communication-related programs

Keywords: access, black graduate student recruitment, social class, public relations education, hbcu

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Critical public relations scholar Nneka Logan (2021) argued that corporations have a responsibility, a moral obligation, to address race because historically they have profited from and perpetuated racial oppression. For example, some (Thomas, 2019, n.p.) have highlighted the hidden links between slavery and Wall Street, suggesting that large U.S. insurance firms such as New York Life, Aetna, and AIG "sold policies that insured slave owners would be compensated if the slaves they owned were injured or killed"; they "counted enslaved people as assets when assessing a person's wealth"; and in an age of social awakening, some U.S. banks recently "have made public apologies for the role they played in slavery." Thus, we see evidence that some organizations are making amends for their role in perpetuating racial oppression.

While we should view such advances as progress, Logan (2021) challenges us to only view such actions as preliminary. She argues that many more organizations must make amends, in part via their public relations and communication efforts, for the role they have played and continue to play in contributing to and benefitting from racial injustice. Logan's corporate responsibility to race (CRR) theory answers an earlier question posed by PR scholars: Does public relations have a place in understanding and theorizing race? (Waymer, 2010).

Some might consider such critical race theorizing beyond the purview of this particular study because public relations educators tend to be more concerned with matters more closely aligned with their day-to-day professional lives: How do we make our classrooms more welcoming places? How do we recruit and retain more underrepresented students? How do we best prepare those students for the profession? We disagree that there should be a separation between critical race theorizing in PR education and practical strategies to further diversify the classroom. To the contrary, we argue that if scholars dug deeper, they would find that by addressing diversity issues in higher education, we are also heeding

Logan's call of holding organizations accountable for their racial-oppressive pasts—as historically, racial oppression and slavery were central to the founding, development, and intellectualism and norms of universities in the U. S. (Wilder, 2013). Any efforts to diversify the PR practice and the PR classroom can be viewed as efforts to combat the legacy that lingers from this complicated history. Thus, the connection is clearer, theoretically, between CRR and diversity as good business/educational practice than upon first glance.

From a theoretical standpoint, the link between diversity and public relations theory was established nearly three decades ago by L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Ehling (1992). They argued that requisite variety allows organizations to identify all groups and foster productive relationships with each group. The authors concluded that communicators from underrepresented and culturally diverse backgrounds can translate and intercede on behalf of organizations and diverse groups and vice-versa—thus increasing organizational effectiveness. Without said diversity, organizations are vulnerable—as they inadvertently can overlook, offend, or even alienate some publics and are likely to face repercussions for said actions. As such, without seeking and acquiring requisite variety, organizations can suffer immense reputational threats or outright be deemed illegitimate (Waymer & VanSlette, 2013).

The link between PR education and practice has always been strong, as some argue that the issue of a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the industry begins in college—as college is the pipeline for preparing racially aware undergraduates for the public relations profession (Waymer & Brown, 2018; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). The PR education scholarly literature is replete with examples of how the lack of diversity in practice is a result of an educational pipeline issue; however, what is less explored is how the lack of diversity in the PR classroom is a bona fide educational issue in its own right. For example, researchers have found that African

American students want to see and be taught by at least one professor who identifies as Black American (Brown et al., 2011). So, lack of diversity can contribute to underrepresented student recruitment and retention challenges. Furthermore, most universities require at least a master's degree for faculty instructional status. We cannot hire underrepresented faculty if we do not have underrepresented students pursuing graduate degrees in the discipline. Requisite variety matters in higher education spaces, too; as diversity of thought and lived experiences greatly enhance the learning environment.

This issue has now garnered attention, nationally, in the communication scholarly community. Two of the largest educational associations that have public relations divisions in the United States are the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the National Communication Association (NCA). Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)—the nation's leading professional organization for public relations professionals—has an active educators' division and offers accreditation of higher education PR programs. All organizations highlight diversity and multicultural competencies in their strategic plans (AEJMC, 2021; NCA, 2015; PRSA, 2020-2022). NCA specifically states that it "supports inclusiveness and diversity among our faculties, within our membership, in the workplace, and in the classroom; NCA supports and promotes policies that fairly encourage this diversity and inclusion" (para. 2). While diversity is a multifaceted concept that is used to discuss several aspects of identity including gender, sexuality, ability, age, and religion, in higher education, faculty, staff, and student body racial/ethnic diversity is arguably the primary demographic category institutions use to assess whether they are a more or less diverse and inclusive environment (Davis, 2002). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that any effort to increase African American or other underrepresented graduate student enrollment in public relations and communication-related programs across the nation aligns with the aforementioned educational associations' strategic plans—as enrolling more African American graduate students in these programs increases the likelihood of having more African American students participate in these associations, entering the profession as practitioners, and potentially increasing the size of the pool from which to hire African American faculty.

A recent Council on Graduate Schools (2018) report indicated that in 2017 (the last year of data gathered in this report), nearly 50,000 African American students were enrolled in graduate schools for the first time, and they constituted 11.9 percent of all first-time graduate students at U.S. universities. African Americans constituted 18.8 percent of all first-time graduate students in public administration, but only 5.7 percent of all first-time graduate students in engineering and less than 4 percent in physical and earth sciences.

Currently, first-time African American graduate student enrollment in communication-related disciplines is about 12 percent (NCA, 2018), which is consistent with first-time African American graduate student enrollment in the social sciences, education, and business (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2018). While this percentage is not glaringly low, on its face it appears that there is the potential of increasing African American public relations and communication-related graduate student enrollment if a well-crafted strategy and plan are put into place that explores students' interest in graduate study as well as barriers to access or other factors that might deter this pursuit.

This study, by strategically examining ways to increase African American representation in public relations and communication-related graduate programs, aligns directly with AEJMC's, PRSA's and NCA's mission to foster a more diverse and inclusive organization. Specifically, this study, in part, is a response to calls by scholars who are challenging public relations and communication to address the whiteness—both demographically and intellectually— of the disciplines (Logan, 2021; Waymer, 2021).

Of the three organizations, PRSA was the only organization that provided concrete, measurable objectives in its strategic plan pertaining to increasing the number of African American and other underrepresented students in PR programs. Objective 4 of PRSA's (2020-2022) D&I strategic plan is clear: "Increase and retain the number of multicultural students in PRSSA and new multicultural professionals into PRSA by 15% by 2023" (n.p.). We use PRSA's ambitious recruitment and retention goals as impetus for this study. Further, in the spirit of Brown et. al (2011), we seek to find ways to broaden the pipeline of underrepresented students who can acquire teaching credentials.

Consequently, research questions that drive this study include:

RQ1: How do underrepresented students majoring in applied communication disciplines at minority-serving institutions describe their educational and work-preparation in the major and its related extracurricular activities?

Currently, there are just over 100 HBCUs in the U.S., and around half of them offer a graduate degree of any kind; only 10 HBCUs offer a graduate degree in journalism/applied communication disciplines, with Howard University being the only institution to offer a PhD in the discipline (HBCU Colleges, 2021). These facts compelled us to ask these research questions.

RQ2: To what extent are HBCU students aware of graduate studies in the discipline or are interested in pursuing graduate studies in the discipline?

RQ3: What barriers, if any, to application or entrance into applied communication graduate programs exist for African American students majoring in a public relations or another communication-related discipline at HBCUs?

Rationale for Choosing HBCUs as Investigative Site

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are chosen because they play a major role in producing college-educated African Americans, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Chiles, 2017; Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). Furthermore, HBCU supporters highlight that despite African Americans only representing 3% of all colleges in the United States, HBCUs enroll 12% of all Black college students, produce nearly a quarter of all Black college graduates (Waymer & Street, 2015, 2016), and they produce many professionals who have earned advanced degrees including "80 percent of the black judges, 50 percent of the black lawyers, [and] 50 percent of the black doctors" (Hill, 2019, n.p.).

Another reason we chose HBCUs as our scholarly investigation site is because HBCUs are diverse institutions that capture and reflect intragroup diversity well (Palmer, 2015). As Palmer (2015) noted, "there are black students who are first-generation, international, high-achieving, conservative, liberal, non-traditional, gay, straight, bisexual, and transgender" at HBCUs (para, 8). Therefore, if we want to identify those diverse African American students who might be potential candidates for graduate study in public relations and communication and better understand their graduate preparation and readiness, we can gain insights by strategically targeting large HBCUs in different U.S. states.

Even though there are around 100 HBCUs in the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Anderson, 2017), only 24 of them have undergraduate enrollments exceeding 3,500 students (Affordable Schools, 2019). Communication faculty found that student participation in extracurricular clubs, and honor societies—especially those sponsored by the academic department—are vital to students' academic socialization, success, and preparation for entering the workforce as a communication professional (Nadler, 1997; Waymer, 2014; Waymer et al., 2018). Thus, students who are either involved with a Lambda Pi Eta chapter—the National Communication Association's (2019) official national honor society at four-year colleges and universities—or a Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)—"the foremost organization for students interested in public relations and communications [that advocates for] rigorous academic standards for public relations education, the highest ethical principles and diversity in the profession" (PRSSA, 2019, para 1), should be highly motivated, high-achieving students who have the acumen and might possess the drive to pursue graduate study. The five institutions included in this study meet the criteria above and represent the Mid-Atlantic region, the Southeastern region, and the Southern region of the U.S.

Methods

In this study, we visited, in-person, five HBCUs and conducted one focus group interview per site with 4 to 5 undergraduate students per group at each institution (*N*=22, 12 women, 10 men. We visited one HBCU in South Carolina, one HBCU in Alabama, one HBCU in Louisiana, and two HBCUs in the Washington, D. C., Maryland, Virginia (DMV) metropolitan area. In some instances, participants volunteered their classification year in school. These data were collected between January and February 2020. Nine other schools agreed to participate in this study, but travel plans were canceled due to COVID-19. While it may have been possible to conduct additional focus groups via Internet technologies such as Zoom, we deemed in-person visits to be vital because HBCUs have a unique culture all their own:

> The Yard. For hundreds of thousands of folks who have attended HBCUs since the first historically Black college, Cheyney, Pennsylvania's The Institution for Colored Youth, was established in 1837, the term evokes a myriad of images. The Yard is a celebration of unapologetic Blackness. It's the gathering place on

> campus where students can hang out, catch up between classes, break intellectual bread, get it in at the campus party or fall in love. The Yard helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and '60's. Here, Black lives have always mattered. (One Yard, 2020)

Zoom would not enable the researchers to walk across campuses, get first-hand looks at the classrooms, the facilities and equipment, or to experience, personally, the pride and culture exhibited at these institutions. One might argue that one cannot fully appreciate HBCU culture without witnessing it first-hand. Furthermore, if participants complained about lack of resources, we were able to verify those claims immediately. Students participated in focus group interviews which lasted about 1 hour each. All focus groups were transcribed by authors.

The authors conducted focus groups to examine HBCU students' knowledge and perceptions of graduate study in public relations and communication-related disciplines in the United States. Focus groups as a research method (see Goldman & Waymer, 2014; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1996, 1997) is an optimal method for this study because this demographic is highly susceptible to peer influence. Often scholars who explore social influence and peer pressure among college-aged students do so as a means of examining students' willingness to engage in risky behaviors such as consuming too much alcohol or engaging in risky sex (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Fielder & Carey, 2010). We, however, believe that social influence and peer pressure also can lead to positive behaviors, such as encouraging students from underrepresented groups, in a group setting, to consider the possibilities of pursuing graduate education. As such, it is key to see how a group of college-aged students in the same peer group would view and discuss the potential of graduate education. Thus, this method allows the researchers to adequately address the research questions.

According to Krueger (1994) focus groups are "carefully planned discussion[s] designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 6). Focus group methodological best practices suggest that participants are arranged in a way that they can provide and receive eye contact from the focus group moderator and each other, and these arrangements were adapted in this study (Krueger, 1994).

I, the first author, an African American man, post-graduate degree holder, moderated each focus group. While I had no formal relationship with the participants, I was welcomed as being a member of the community. Scholars have argued that for researchers to recruit and retain study participants successfully as well as facilitate group rapport, using team members who are recognized as welcomed members of the target population or community is crucial (White et al., 2019). I established rapport with both the participants and the administrators who granted access to the students by talking about my experiences—successes and challenges—of being a student-centered faculty member at a prominent HBCU from 2017-2019. I was able to draw from my prior published studies on HBCUs to demonstrate expertise on the subject matter. Also, my credibility was bolstered by my post-graduate degree, given the focus of the study centered on uncovering access, barriers, and opportunities for graduate study for HBCU undergraduate students. I represented an example, a different voice than their current professors, of what one could pursue with a graduate degree in the discipline.

All sessions were audio recorded. After participants were introduced to the study and topic and completed the consent forms, the first author asked the participants a series of questions about their view of graduate education in public relations and communication-related disciplines. All comments made during the sessions and the moderator notes counted as data.

After the data were gathered, we began analyzing data. We each read and analyzed the transcripts of participants. The multiple readings ensured that our potential different perceptions would be addressed via reading and discussion, as the second author is an African American female. As the reading and rereading of transcripts occurred (stopping the recordings frequently to discuss the meaning of statements), we began the process of memoing, comparing and interrogating categories using generative questions, and developing themes using grounded theory (see Charmaz, 2005; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). We used inductive analysis. This prescribes linking and relating sub-categories by denoting conditions, context, and consequences, based on the structure of the interview guide. We examined interviews to answer the research questions by identifying repetitive themes and concepts that addressed the questions until the list became repetitive and exhaustive (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process allowed us to analyze the data without making assumptions; additionally, it involved paying close attention to the data beginning at the point of data collection. Throughout the iterative process of analysis, we wrote memos that summarized relationships between codes, captured insights and impressions into the data, and elaborated on key conceptual issues (Glaser, 1978). The themes of responses manifested through a method of constant comparison and evaluation of the transcripts, looking at causal conditions, context, and interactions. Finally, we examined the central ideas that emerged from the aggregate of concepts and made inferences and recommendations based upon them.

Results

In response to RQ1, students shared a variety of reasons for choosing their majors and talked about their preparedness via the curriculum in several ways. Four dominant themes emerged. These themes are as follows: How do students choose their communications major? What are their exploratory experiences during college? What are their post-graduation career plans? What are their perceptions of their job preparedness on the market? Each of these themes is discussed in greater detail below.

Selection of Student Majors

First, many mentioned that their majors aligned with their interests and talents. Several told the moderator that they enjoyed speaking and were good at communicating, excelled in writing, considered themselves vocal, or had been told they had a good or unique voice for careers in television or radio. Some students were driven by a desire to help others and felt that studying communication would allow them to fulfill that desire. Students also mentioned lifelong goals of being on TV or the radio. Others recalled admiring media figures on news or sports broadcasts or discussed interests in social media, trends, image, and branding that drew them to study communications. They also identified the influence of others who enjoyed studying communication. One student shared that her goal was to increase the representation of African American women on television.

Several students perceived communication to be a field that would give them the freedom to be creative, express themselves through their work, or develop their own career paths. Some were drawn to the breadth of the field. Others described a desire to use their skills behind the scenes. "My biggest goal is to…portray people's dreams the way they wanted them to be portrayed," one student said.

Students talked about choosing communication majors through a process of discovery after trying other fields. Some mentioned not liking math, struggling in their original courses of study, realizing they lacked passion for their original area, or simply evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, leading to another choice of major. While some students changed their majors, others changed their emphases within a communication program. For example, one student realized that she liked journalism but did not want to become a reporter. She found that she enjoyed devising communication strategies. As a result, she changed her emphasis from journalism to public relations. Others spoke about discovering that they preferred PR to marketing. Students talked about the influence of parents, members of a parent's network, or a professor in helping them decide to study public relations or communication.

Post-Graduation Career Plans

Some students shared that they planned to go to graduate school to pursue careers in media or film. Media and film were a popular option for a couple of reasons: first, at two of the smaller HBCUs we visited, the schools did not have the resources to have an exclusive public relations curriculum; thus, students enrolled in other classes such as media and film to complete their degree requirements. Second, students wanted to be famous and be on television as indicated above, so they assumed studying media and film could prepare them for fame and acclaim. Thus, while students overall expressed some interest in graduate school, their plans were not well-articulated. In fact, several shared the fallacious sentiment that the master's degree is the "new bachelor's" degree, so they knew they needed to go back to school eventually to "stay ahead," earn their desired salary, or achieve other long-term goals. For many, this was the extent of their reflection on graduate school. Several expressed a desire to take a semester or a year off before returning for a graduate degree, and some hoped to attend schools that are closer to their families. Many saw graduate study as a way to broaden the range of opportunities available to them and had researched them. Samantha stated: "I feel like I need to master more skills, and grad school will definitely help me do that."

Other students hoped to go directly into the field, working as publicists or in corporate marketing communication departments. Many said that they already had strong connections with potential employers. Some of these students planned to pursue additional study but first wanted to work in industry. They felt unsure about the timing of a return to school, wanted to gain job experience, or hoped to work for major media outlets or leading PR firms. Many wanted to get a sense of what to specialize in before returning to school.

Financial concerns factored into students' decision-making; for example, some students were interested in online graduate programs that would allow them to study while building their careers, noting that they were expected to become financially independent after graduation. Some expressed a desire to earn good salaries. Others said they planned to pursue a master's degree eventually but would need significant financial support.

Exploratory Experiences

The students who participated in the focus groups had a broad range of experiences related to jobs, internships, and other preparation to enter the field. Some students mentioned having more than one internship, which allowed them to talk with professionals about their education and career paths. Several made inroads at large companies, including IBM and BET; one had written bylined articles for the food section of a local newspaper. One student observed that her internship "reinforced what I learned in class" and "made the experience better. I was actually going out on assignments and having to shoot, edit, and all that kind of stuff." Another found that her internship opened her eyes to the 24/7 nature of some jobs in PR. A student who gained experience at a firm owned by an alumnus of her school had significant responsibilities for social media but realized she eventually wanted a broader portfolio of projects. Another learned that she preferred PR over broadcasting as a result of her experiences. One did an internship at a local nonprofit organization. Some students mentioned opportunities in campus media, including newspapers, radio, and TV stations. Others gained professional experience by using what they had learned in the classroom to promote student clubs.

While some students felt that their departments had made valuable connections, others wanted more variety in their options for internships.

Some students in the DMV felt that "It's either Capitol Hill or pretty much nothing." Some sensed that there were many resources for internships but that the information wasn't communicated well or was limited to select students. Some felt that local Black-owned businesses were not helpful to students seeking internships. Others mentioned having personal or mental health struggles that prevented them from pursuing internships.

Several students mentioned the effect that finances had on their ability to pursue internships. Students who had greater financial responsibilities often could not afford to take unpaid internships and felt at a disadvantage. One student noted that she had worked at restaurants and was good at marketing, upselling, and customer service. She wanted help to represent her experience in ways that would be viewed favorably as she applied for corporate jobs. Another student, Denise, was fearful because she hadn't been able to do an off-campus internship for financial reasons:

> My little—my resume is built on things I've done on campus. [There's] nothing that I have done outside, with a company, things that somebody can vouch for me…I'm very afraid because I don't think my resume and my experience is going to get me to where I want to be and what I can imagine.

Preparation for the Job Market: "Networking Center" vs. A Place to "Get It out the Mud"

Students also reported a range of experiences with preparation for the job market. Students at a DMV, higher-resourced HBCU comparatively viewed their department as "a networking center." Students at this institution said their school had a reputation for helping students find internships: "They put us on with so many internships and opportunities and they make sure that we'll at least be in the right track to have a job by the time we graduate." Students observed that their department held frequent career fairs and internship fairs—some specifically for communication and PR students—and that many of their professors are well-known, work in PR, and own consulting firms. They felt that they were receiving an experience that was better than students at some PWIs and other HBCUs.

At other schools, students expressed that their professors provided training, prepared them to compete with students from larger schools, and often e-mailed information about local jobs. One student observed that professors played a significant role in preparing students for potential challenges they may face as Black professionals: “They…encourage us to keep going because of the lack of representation…they keep it real with us…they try to encourage us to keep going and to just do as much as we can.”

Conversely, some students at lesser-resourced HBCUs expressed deep frustration with their institutions, observing, for example, that their software and equipment—some of which had been purchased by a professor using personal funds—was severely outdated. Maxine lamented: “it’s no reason why we’re still doing Photoshop from 2002, why we’re still doing InDesign from 2000, like, we need to be evolving with it too, like our cameras, our equipment, the photography room, like stuff that’s just so old.” Michael stated: “y’all know, we go to [this school] like we’re under-resourced and everything like that. So we got to grind a little bit harder.” Claire stated:

> There is a lack of resources, a major lack of resources… But see, this is media, right? Media is changing every day. We’re not changing with the media every day. So we’re learning stuff. Absolutely. But we’re learning stuff that is already setting us behind. This is--everybody says, well, I don’t know if everybody says but I say, me and my friends say, this is a get-it-out-the-mud school, [sound of students agreeing] because you literally have to go that extra mile and get it out the mud.”

The students on more than one occasion referred to these schools colloquially as "a school where we have to get it out the mud." According to Urban Dictionary (2018), "Get it out the mud, refers to someone who only had themselves to rely on, to become stable, financially, physically and mentally. They drug themselves out the mud, with no help from family and friends." In this instance, the students feel that any job they might land or opportunity they might come across is exclusively their responsibility to make happen. These students worried that they would not be as prepared for the workforce as their competitors. Others felt that they were being taught material that had not evolved alongside the changes in the industry. They saw little value in parts of the general studies curriculum and felt that they had to fend for themselves when finding internships. These students were concerned by a perceived lack of movement or progress since their arrival on campus as first-year students. They wanted more guidance that felt relevant to their career goals.

Considering Graduate School

In response to RQ2, it was evident from these data that many of the students who participated in the focus groups had considered going to graduate school in communication after graduation. Students gave a variety of reasons for this consideration. Some students had been advised that an undergraduate degree would not be sufficient; others felt that they had received a solid foundation but needed to continue to develop their skills. Many saw graduate school as potentially providing a competitive advantage, resulting in better jobs or higher compensation. A student stated: "it seems like a lot of people, the higher up you get, of course, it seems like the more probable it is that you attained a master's degree. So--and I want to be high up..." One student felt that having more education would increase her credibility and competitiveness among White co-workers; another expressed that adding diversity to her resume by attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) would make her a more marketable job candidate. Another indicated that she wanted to work for large corporations; she expected the competition to be more intense in the larger cities where she wanted to live. Some students were considering graduate school in business or law.

Some students were motivated to continue their studies by being the first person in their family to attend college; others wanted to continue a family legacy of pursuing graduate education. Students also mentioned being influenced by professors and family members. While most of the students were considering graduate school, many were trying to decide whether to go immediately or take a break after receiving the BA. Others questioned whether an additional degree is needed in the field or felt that networking was a more impactful strategy for future career success.

Factors that Convince Students to Pursue Graduate Study

In response to RQ3, a dominant theme emerged: financial considerations could both "convince" students to pursue graduate study immediately or deter students from pursuing graduate study if they are provided no or scant financial support. In fact, students in all five focus groups identified financial considerations as critical in considering whether they would pursue graduate study. They frequently responded to the question, "What factors would convince you to pursue graduate study in communications?" with comments like, "If it was being funded...and I was not paying, I would definitely just go right ahead." Several students were opportunity-oriented in addition to being financially motivated. These students said that having a guaranteed opportunity for a job or placement at the end of the program would be a motivating factor. They expressed a desire for stability, and some were concerned about the potential opportunity cost of going to graduate school after graduation rather than entering the workforce immediately. "[I want] something that makes it seem like I'm getting closer to my job instead of just, like, a stalling point to get into my career," one student said.

Some students were skeptical about whether a graduate degree would provide the advantage they sought. Others were concerned about whether to choose another HBCU or a PWI for a graduate degree, or wondered if earning an MA would cause people to view them negatively: “You’re uppity,” one student said, expressing this concern. Another questioned the value of earning a degree in environments that are not diverse: “The big companies [are] not diverse; they obviously don’t want us there. So how can that benefit me, getting the grad degree to fight for a spot that I’m unwanted in? I just don’t understand.” Others were concerned that their schools had not provided them with the education or exposure to equipment to give them the drive to go to graduate school. They felt that they were teaching themselves in the undergraduate setting and feared that they were not prepared for further study.

Factors that Prevent Students from Pursuing Graduate Study

Students in the focus groups stated that financial considerations could also be a critical factor in preventing them from pursuing graduate study in communications. Allyson said, “So, I would say money, number one” why she would not go to graduate school. Many were prepared to postpone graduate school if their “dream job” became available: “If it offered both money and opportunity,” one student said. Interestingly, many of these students expressed confidence that they would eventually attend graduate school—it was just a matter of timing. Others shared that not having tuition would keep them from considering graduate programs in communication. “I’m barely making tuition here,” Kyla said, explaining why she would need funding. Another student, Melissa, explained that she already carries loans from her undergraduate experience, saying money concerns are “taking me out the game, ’cause…loans are cool and all, but you have to pay them back.” Several students shared a similar aversion to debt, particularly if they didn’t yet have a strong sense of career direction.

Other students shared concerns about whether they could compete, identifying fear and self-doubt as obstacles. Some mentioned mental fatigue and the desire to rest after the undergraduate experience. Students shared that receiving rejection letters would affect them, recalled earlier difficulties with learning or standardized tests, or feared that their undergraduate education was inadequate. Students also mentioned not understanding the application process and timelines and fear and stress related to taking the GRE. Some expressed a belief that companies value experience over education and that a graduate degree may not be necessary if certifications and licenses are available. Others felt that they could work their way up within an organization or would be able to pursue their goals through networking and their natural abilities.

Discussion

The interviews we conducted with students in communication programs at HBCUs reveal a group of emerging professionals who are bright, ambitious, and realistic. Many of these students are planning to attend graduate school or are open to considering it. They have also sought out experiential learning opportunities to prepare for work in industry. However, the data show that lurking beneath the surface of whether these students will pursue graduate education or even feel prepared to do so is a considerable matter of social class. According to Waymer (2012b), social class is a tough concept to understand fully, but it is one that is highly relevant to public relations. Further, Waymer (2012a) argued that public relations scholars, practitioners, and organizations must grapple with issues of social class "because of the determining role that social class status has on persons' life chances" (p. 5). Waymer continues:

> If organizations via public relations activities have the potential to address large social issues and achieve other social goods, then it appears reasonable to expect that these organizations address at least a portion of the needs of lower-class citizens—who tend to be some of the most vulnerable publics in any society. (p. 5)

At some of these institutions where faculty are purchasing equipment and resources from their own pockets, or where students are using outdated equipment and are learning skills that are no longer relevant in industry, or where students feel that every internship, everything that they learn they are doing on their own and for themselves, we have clear issues of social class that are furthering the divide in our society between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Even the statement by a student that pursuing a graduate degree might lead people to perceive her as "uppity" is a telling aspect of class identity negation (see Waymer, 2011). In the African American community, being uppity is often used as a pejorative term to denote someone who is "taking liberties or assuming airs beyond one's place in a social hierarchy. Assuming equality with someone higher up the social ladder" (Urban Dictionary, 2007). While recruitment of underrepresented students has been a focal point of public relations researchers for years (Brown et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2011), for a student to dismiss the furthering of her education because of the perceived negative consequences about how she will be perceived (as uppity) in her workplace—and by extrapolation her community—reveals that social class considerations are critical and must be factored into any efforts designed to recruit underrepresented students. There is a legitimate belief among some members in Black community, even among those who are pursuing graduate education, that acquiring education is no "magic bullet" that will ever affect a Black person's upward mobility, station, or lot in life (Sanchez et al., 2011).

While it is always important to discuss the intersectional aspects of identity when conducting identity-focused, qualitative research in public relations (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013), gender did not reveal itself as salient in these data. While it is possible that the moderator's gender being that of a privileged man could have led to gender not emerging as salient from these data, the fact that women constituting nearly 60% of all U.S. college students at the close of 2020-21 academic year (Belkin, 2021), and nearly 70% of first-time African American students pursuing graduate degrees (Council on Graduate Schools, 2018), indicate that in terms of access to college and graduate school, gender (unless we are seeking to address men's underrepresentation in the classroom) is a less salient consideration than race or class (Mintz, 2021) or the combination of the two (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2021). What is more, social class also shapes the career preparedness of students. Claire stated:

> I haven't really had an internship at all. So when I got here, I pretty much--my parents are once you're 18, you got to take care of yourself. So…I immediately started working on top of going to school full time, I was working like 40 hour weeks. And to me during the summer, it's either you work to support yourself, or you get an internship that's not going to pay, then how am I going to get around? Where am I going to live? So I haven't been able to actually do an internship because I've had to work.

Our dataset included students from one of the wealthiest, urban HBCUs as well as students from one of the most rural, Southern, economically challenged HBCUs. With this knowledge in mind, and if we are going to actively address issues of social class via pedagogy, research, and practice, we must ask ourselves as educators the following: what role are our institutions and educational practices playing in "enacting social class norms, reinforcing social class norms, and even masking…[our] role in the continuation of rigid social class stratification" (Waymer, 2012a, p. 7)? Mintz (2021) highlighted how "the concept of merit, now equated with test scores and academic credentials, has been defined too narrowly and has become indistinguishable from social class, denying opportunity, far too often, to outsiders" (n.p.) from lower socioeconomic classes. If we are not critically asking ourselves these questions, then we and our universities are not living up to our social responsibilities—that is to play a constructive role, through community engagement, research, and outreach, to elevate CSR standards with purpose of growing social impact through constructive change (Heath & Waymer, 2021).

Based on the aforementioned findings, we provide four potential suggestions for PR and communication educators for the purposes of increasing the number of students from HBCUs who attend graduate school in public relations and communication.

First, find the funding. Traditionally aged students in undergraduate programs are in the Gen Z age cohort—a group that experienced the 2008 recession during their formative years (How the Great Recession Shaped GenZ, 2017, p. 3). These students are concerned about student loan debt, and they are "pragmatic" about earning and saving money (Data reveals GenZ's pragmatism about the job market & student debt, n.d.). College financial aid offices should explore ways to help students at HBCUs avoid the kind of debt that limits their future educational prospects. Additionally, graduate programs need to consider how to offer attractive financial packages to potential students. Specifically, PWI institutions with robust internship and industry immersion programs, top-notch equipment and curriculum, and financial resources for graduate assistantships should partner with HBCUs to create joint BA/MA degrees with partner HBCUs whereby students spend their last year(s) at a PWI, earn a Master's degree, and receive high-quality, practical experience to land top, paid internships and full-time jobs with agencies, corporations, or NGOs. So, partnership with PWIs can be deemed a solid strategy; however, we believe fervently that this strategy should not be used to thwart the continued development in and advancement of HBCUs nor should this strategy be viewed as a rationale for states and federal government not to address the long-standing inequality between HBCUs and PWIs. In a recent article (Wilson, 2020), the president of Morgan State University (one of the nation's largest HBCUs) lamented the fact that while some HBCUs have R2 doctoral university (high research activity) status based on the Carnegie

Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, no HBCUs are among the top research universities (frequently referred to R1 doctoral university (very high research activity) status):

> If we are to address the systemic barriers put in place over many generations for America's communities of color, we must empower America's highest performing HBCUs to become pillars of America's research enterprise, just as we did for today's elite research universities over the last 70 years. While many of those have built massive, successful research programs, they oftentimes produce research with only tangential value to Black and marginalized communities. (Wilson, 2020, para. 3)

Additionally, industry leaders and nonprofits should explore creative partnerships with educational institutions, such as the LAGRANT Foundation, to provide students with incentives such as guaranteed job opportunities or resume-building experience to potentially overcome the perceived opportunity cost of attending graduate school rather than immediately entering the workforce.

Second, be consistent with career development. Career development offices remain critical to students' vocational growth. They can guide students to think carefully about their skills and interests early enough to avoid costly dead-ends on the road to declaring majors. They can also find ways to enhance partnerships with professors and marketing initiatives to ensure that students know about available opportunities—both vocationally and at the graduate program level.

Third, join the "GRExit" movement. Graduate schools can drop the GRE requirement, removing an often-onerous burden that creates socioeconomic barriers, "disadvantages applicants from underrepresented groups," and does not accurately predict a student's ability to succeed in graduate school (Hu, 2020).

Fourth, refresh curriculum regularly if possible. We recognize that this is dependent upon resources available, but if partnerships from PWIs, nonprofits, and industry are in place, the HBCUs of lower social class status would have the resources and support to ensure that students have access to updated equipment and curriculum that reflect current issues and trends, providing students with confidence in their education, momentum for the future, and a return on their investments of money and time.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Even though we feel we have a good mix of HBCUs (large vs. small, rural vs. urban, Southern vs. Southeastern vs. Mid-Atlantic) represented in this study, we still only conducted five focus groups. COVID-19 severely limited our ability to conduct further focus group interviews on HBCU campuses, and we felt that given the nature of the topic, it was paramount for us to be present on those campuses, for us to walk and tour the campuses and their facilities, and for us to meet with students on their campuses in spaces that were comfortable to them. Even with this limitation in mind, we reached saturation with the themes that emerged and feel our findings are representative of the feelings of current HBCU students and their interests in pursuing graduate education and the barriers they perceive are present to this pursuit. Future research should explore other potential challenges that should be lessened to increase the number of HBCU students who attend graduate school in public relations or other communication-related disciplines. Additionally, future research should ask HBCU administrators what strategies, tactics, programs, or initiatives do they believe to be useful for the successful placement of African American and other underrepresented undergraduates into graduate public relations and communication-related programs.

Conclusion

While progress has been made over the past two decades in terms of increasing (doubling) the number of underrepresented racial and ethnic persons practicing public relations (see Nguyen, 2015), industry professionals and academics alike have lamented and continue to lament the lack of racial and ethnic diversity amongst public relations—both in the classroom and in industry (Berger, 2012; McGirt, 2018; O'Dwyer, 2018; Waymer & Brown, 2018). Stated simply, despite the fact that industry leaders have prioritized diversity in public relations (O'Dwyer, 2018), progress in the area of increasing the number of underrepresented racial and ethnic persons working in the profession or even majoring in the discipline has been slow. We offer this study and its findings as a contribution to the existing vein of research designed to add further racial, ethnic, and class-based diversity to the profession and our academic institutions.

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A Shortage of Excellence? An Exploratory Study of U.S. Doctoral-level Education in Public Relations

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory content analysis of doctoral-level education in public relations at U.S. universities describes the state of doctoral training in the discipline, applies existing best practice criteria, and generates recommendations for improving the structures and processes that undergird the preparation of new scholars and faculty members. Bringing together existing doctoral and master's-level best practices from the discipline alongside doctoral best practices from the broader fields of communication and mass communication, this paper explicates the work of strengthening public relations doctoral programs and improving the size and quality of the graduate student-to-faculty pipeline. Key recommendations include additional codification of public relations and strategic communication tracks and classes within broader doctoral programs, as well as a more explicit commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I) as a measurable value and objective for doctoral programs.

Keywords: d&i, inclusion, diversity, doctoral education, public relations

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While the public relations field has seen significant growth in the volume and quality of pedagogical scholarship over the past several decades, there has been a shortage in the number of scholars produced for available tenure-track faculty positions (Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Commission on Public Relations Education [CPRE], 2012; Turk, 2006; Wright & Flynn, 2017). U.S. doctoral-level education in the public relations discipline has yet to be studied systematically. Foundational studies have examined undergraduate education (e.g., CPRE, 2018; Turk, 2006) and master's-level programs (e.g., Aldoory & Toth, 2000; Briones & Toth, 2013; CPRE, 2012; Toth & Briones, 2013; Weissman et al., 2019) and touched on doctoral education (Auger & Cho, 2016), but, even as scholars have spoken to the "shortage of excellence" in public relations teaching and research (Wright, 2011, p. 245; Wright & Flynn, 2017, p. 55), little has been done to formalize expectations for doctoral programs and graduate students to help address this gap. The Commission on Public Relations Education's (CPRE) 1999 report provided broad guidelines for curriculum and learning objectives in U.S.-based public relations doctoral programs, but no research has evaluated (1) whether these guidelines have been followed by existing programs and (2) what updates, adjustments, and improvements could be made to better address the needs of today's graduate students and tomorrow's faculty members.

As a young discipline (in academic time), U.S. public relations graduate students do not have wide accessibility to highly developed, focused, and established degrees and programs at the doctoral level. Yet, they still have more opportunities than other countries. As of 2017, Canada had no doctoral programs allowing students to focus on public relations (Wright & Flynn, 2017). Therefore, this research addresses this lacuna to better understand the programs that currently train tomorrow's scholars and educators. The results and discussion propose an updated framework for doctoral programs to ensure they provide students with access to the best-possible preparation for the research, teaching, service, and professional work. Additionally, given the significant challenges faced by faculty of color across disciplines (e.g., Arnold et al., 2016; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020; Haynes et al., 2020), and the underrepresentation of faculty of color in communication and mass communication (e.g., Hon et al., 1999; Murthy, 2020; Stephens, 2003), as well as within the discipline and profession of public relations (e.g., Landis, 2019; Place & Vanc, 2016; Tindall, 2009a, 2009b; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017; Waymer & Brown, 2018; Wills, 2020), this project looks to add student and faculty diversity and inclusion (D&I) as measurable outcomes of successful doctoral programs.

The purpose of this project is to, first, provide an exploratory examination of existing U.S. public relations education at the doctoral level and compare the findings with existing and emergent best practices. Next, as doctoral best practices in the discipline have not been studied (CPRE, 1999), the researchers investigate and connect existing best practices in master's-level programs in public relations with research from related doctoral programs in communication and mass communication to recommend updated guidelines. The results provide crucial insights about who is teaching public relations doctoral students, how students are being taught, and how these processes may be improved.

Literature Review

The first public relations degree at any level offered in the U.S. was Boston University's Master of Science in 1947 (Wright, 2011; Wright & Flynn, 2017). While the discipline has seen significant efforts in the interim to generate best practices, there is little uniformity in the structure of public relations graduate education in the U.S., either at the master's or doctoral level (e.g., Briones et al., 2017; CPRE, 1999; Toth & Briones, 2013). Previous research on master's-level education has focused on the variety of existing programs and attempted to understand how they address the changing needs of students and the PR industry. Multiple factors have contributed to this variety, including the multiple models for students prioritizing doctoral education or professional development, evolving specialization within the public relations profession (Turk, 2006), and an attempt to bridge the ongoing disconnect between existing curricula and employer-demanded skills (Toth & Briones, 2013). Yet, this variety at the master's level has not translated into a similar depth of programs at the doctoral level.

Best Practices in U.S. PR Graduate Education

A U.S. doctoral degree in public relations should serve as a gateway for graduates to generate research specific to the discipline (for scholarly or organizational purposes), teach and mentor students at multiple levels, and serve the academy and the profession (CPRE, 1999). Beginning in the 1970s, a series of commissions led the discipline's direction on education and pedagogy at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Wright and Turk (2007) outlined the historical path from the 1970s to 2006, beginning with the first formal commission in 1973-1975. At the graduate level, it recognized the shortage of doctoral programs in existence at the time and focused its attention on strengthening the research components of master's programs. By 1985, a reconstituted commission recognized the growing need for improved graduate education, as well as a more defined structure for undergraduate skills and expectations (Wright & Turk, 2007, p. 577). For the doctoral programs, the commission strongly advocated for an increased focus on research and methodology development. Unlike the master's-level PR programs, a public relations doctoral program should focus on helping students develop theoretical and methodological skills applicable to either an academic or applied research setting (CPRE, 1999).

In contrast to scholarship in journalism, which prioritizes professional development research (Macdonald, 2006), CPRE cemented the importance of social science research as the center of academic public relations' scholarly inquiry and doctoral training (1999). Delineated expectations for graduate education in public relations were initially developed in 1985 by the Commission on Graduate Public Relations Education (Aldoory & Toth, 2000), and later updated in the CPRE report, *Standards for a Master's Degree in Public Relations: Educating for Complexity* (CPRE, 2012). According to the report, all master's degree-seeking students should be exposed to a core curriculum with five content areas: (1) strategic public relations management, (2) basic business principles and processes, (3) communication/public relations theory and research methods, (4) global influences on the practice of public relations, and (5) ethics (see CPRE, 2012, pp. 11-15). It describes a "fork in the road" (p. 16), where curricula should diverge for professional- and academic-focused students. The recommended academic track includes additional courses in research, as well as a thesis, in contrast to a professional track, which would include a topical or industry specialization (e.g., health communication, crisis/risk communication, sports public relations, etc.) and an internship or practicum experience.

Table 1: Public Relations Master's-Level Competencies, Topics, and Foci

Professional & Academic M.A. (CPRE, 2012, pp. 5-6)	**Academic M.A. (CPRE, 2012, p. 6)**
Globalization	Public relations theories
Entrepreneurship	Advanced critical thinking
Technology	Advanced social science research
Ethics	Applied public relations research skills
Organizational function and business knowledge	Public relations classroom pedagogy
Role of communication in society	Preparation to enter doctoral programs
Leadership skills	
Teamwork skills	
Critical thinking and problem solving	
Social science research	
Communication management	

The most complete set of guidelines for U.S. doctoral programs in public relations was completed by the CPRE as part of its 1999 report: *A Port of Entry*. It offered four recommended outcomes for doctoral graduates: (1) to be prepared for faculty and high-level managerial roles, (2) to be well versed in public relations theory and concepts, as well as related fields in communication and mass communication, (3) to be able to generate original research that contributes to the discipline of public relations, and (4) to contribute to new paradigms and directions for the communication and mass communication fields. In order to achieve these ends, the report makes a number of curricular recommendations (see Table 2).

Table 2: Recommendation for the U.S. Public Relations Doctoral Curriculum

(CPRE, 1999, p. 18)
1. "The core curriculum of most Ph.D. programs in communication or mass communication stresses research and theory building through courses in communication theory, philosophy of science, research methods and statistical and qualitative research tools."
2. "A public relations Ph.D. candidate should also take the bulk of his or her coursework in these core areas of research skills. It is essential that the instructors of these core courses understand public relations, encourage new research on public relations problems and encourage the building of public relations theories. This has seldom been the case in current Ph.D. programs."
3. "In addition, the Ph.D. programs should offer several specialized seminars in public relations on topics such as public relations management and its appropriate place in the organizational structure; behavior of publics; public relations roles, law, history and operations; and global perspectives on public relations"
4. "Public relations Ph.D. students should be encouraged to take research seminars in related to social, behavioral and business sciences that are particularly relevant to public relations in order to learn the theories and methods of those related disciplines. These courses, for example, could include the sociology of organization, organizational communication, operations research and management science, political behavior, sociology of collective behavior, public opinion, language usage and communication and social psychology."

5.	"Finally, the public relations Ph.D. candidate should conduct dissertation research in which he or she studies theory applicable to the solution of important public relations problems and in specific topic areas in public relations such as investor relations, crisis management, issues management, social responsibility, marketing public relations, and integrated communications.
6.	"However, a doctoral program also has the obligation to prepare students to teach by involving students in the classroom and developing their teaching skills because many, if not most, graduates will accept positions as public relations faculty.

These recommendations point to establishing a foothold for public relations within existing U.S. communication and mass communication doctoral programs, and creating additional space to perform public relations research, lead public relations seminars, and allow students to pursue their individual interests. For a discipline early on in its development at the doctoral level, these recommendations broadened the ability for students enrolled in existing programs to focus more directly on public relations as the center of their study. Many of these recommendations should be familiar to more recent doctoral graduates. This study seeks, in part, to evaluate this progress. Yet, as undergraduate public relations programs have expanded rapidly, these recommendations and limited disciplinary doctoral program offerings may not be enough to keep pace with the demand for new public relations faculty (Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Wright & Flynn, 2017).

Pipeline Challenges for U.S. Doctoral Programs in Public Relations

The applied nature of the discipline has meant that public relations faculty are often expected to have terminal degrees and "experience in the public relations field" (CPRE, 2018, p. 106), for example, Toth (2010) and Smudde (2020) argue for the value of both professional and academic experiences for doctoral students and researchers. Due to practical enrollment needs, public relations faculty are often recruited and/ or rewarded for their professional knowledge and ability to teach rather than their ability to conduct research (Botan & Taylor, 2004). For doctoral programs, this poses a significant potential problem for inequity between the discipline of public relations and other disciplines in communication and mass communication with more established and developed Ph.D. pipelines. The challenge is compounded by the lack of existing faculty in communication and mass communication doctoral programs who focus on or specialize in public relations, which contributes to the gap of Ph.D. graduates with a public relations research focus (CPRE, 1999). While these challenges are present today, they are not new—as explained by the CPRE more than two decades ago:

> It is essential that the instructors of these core courses understand public relations, encourage new research on public relations problems, and encourage the building of public relations theories. This has seldom been the case in current doctoral programs. (CPRE, 1999, p. 18)

Around this same time, Johnson and Ross (2000) found fewer than 10 public relations graduates at the doctoral level in 1995 and 1999[1]. As undergraduate enrollments for public relations majors have increased, doctoral programs have not kept pace (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). According to Wright (2011) and Wright and Flynn (2017), one of challenges in finding well-qualified faculty is the insistence by U.S. universities on having doctoral graduates or those with terminal degrees as faculty members, in the midst of exceptional growth of undergraduate student enrollment in public relations courses, particularly at smaller institutions. In 2012, the CPRE report focused on master's programs recommended that these programs could "help address the shortage

1 The data appears to be based on degree name (i.e., Ph.D. in Public Relations), thus potentially undercounting those who have received Ph.D.s in Communication or Mass Communication with an emphasis in public relations, as the vast majority of current faculty have.

of public relations faculty" by "mentoring talented students in their master's degree programs to earn doctoral degrees and acquire significant professional experience (p. 30). Yet, many R1 universities[2], particularly the elite universities that produce a disproportionate number of doctoral graduates, do not dedicate resources to doctoral programs in public relations that would help rectify this imbalance. Despite the availability of tenure-track positions in public relations and the general sentiment that at least some public relations faculty should hold terminal degrees in the field (CPRE, 2012; 2018; Turk, 2006), doctoral education in public relations has lagged behind the demand. According to the most recent CPRE report (2018),

> while not every university teaching position can be tenured, it is important that there are tenured faculty in public relations programs to help provide leadership and influence in faculty governance. Tenured educators help secure resources and funding as well as providing sustainability by ensuring that programs remain relevant in teaching students worthwhile skills and abilities. Additionally, tenured faculty are instrumental in leading and directing research that ultimately enhances the public relations industry by testing and verifying that teaching methods and industry practices are achieving their desired output. (p. 102)

The shortage of terminal degree-earners continues to drive the over-reliance on professional-track faculty (e.g., adjuncts and part-time instructors), despite the governance and accreditation challenges it creates for colleges (Turk, 2006). Even as professionals in the field have increasingly embraced graduate education (DiStaso et al., 2009) and

2 Under the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, doctoral granting institutions (those that award more than 20 doctorates each year) are classified as R1 (Very High Research Activity), R2 (High Research Activity) or R3 (Doctoral/Professional Universities) (Kosar & Scott, 2018).

master's degree programs have multiplied (Shen & Toth, 2013), doctoral-level education has not followed the same trajectory.

Professionally, success as tenure-track faculty is also dependent on doctoral students building relationships that support research productivity and successful job searches. Relationships and relationship-building can be understood from a social network perspective, as networks of relationships play a significant impact on doctoral students' abilities to gain employment (weak ties), as well as build research and mentoring partnerships (strong ties) (Saffer, 2015). Effective doctoral programs generate ties among students and faculty—building social capital for graduates and giving students and early career scholars the chance to fill "structural holes of a learning network" (p. 7)—yet the spoils of inequity disproportionately go to those already set up to succeed from elite doctoral programs (Holley & Gardner, 2012). This may be reflected at an individual level, affecting traditionally marginalized students more than privileged students, as well as at the level of the discipline, as public relations faculty often represent a small group of scholars at larger institutions. Other faculty in communication and mass communication programs may also perceive public relations as "dirty work" or less academically worthy than other disciplines (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020, p. 1), leading public relations scholarship to be potentially marginalized within departments that lack an established core group of PR faculty. In a survey, Neuendorft et al. (2007) asked communication scholars to rank successful doctoral programs in the field and found that only 20% of faculty and 22% of program chairs thought that more doctoral programs should emphasize the promotional communication category, including public relations and advertising. Additionally, 27% of faculty thought that there was already too much of an emphasis on these areas. Given these disciplinary challenges, the next section examines best practices in doctoral education from across academia.

Best Practices in U.S. Doctoral Education

Significant research across higher education has provided broad recommendations and guardrails for doctoral education. A leading model to understand the process is grounded in *socialization*—explaining doctoral training as professional identity development through relationship building with those in the research area (e.g., Sweitzer, 2009). This combines a network mindset with the idea that students who are more willing to develop their professional identity will be more successful at setting relevant goals and completing the necessary work during their time in graduate school. As few, if any, doctoral students begin with a complete understanding of the path toward faculty careers, graduate programs have a responsibility to provide professionalization training, networking opportunities, and practical career guidance to students (Wulff et al., 2004).

Gardner's (2009) multi-disciplinary study defines success in doctoral programs as a combination of academic achievement, retention, degree completion, and professional skill development for academic positions (research, teaching, etc.). Across diverse disciplines, faculty members in what Gardner defines as *successful departments* (based on the completion rate of their graduate students relative to national averages for their field) identified two key markers of students' success: empowerment through self-direction and a desire and ability to disseminate research through conferences and publications. By contrast, departments with low completion rates had a less collegial and more competitive environment among current students and focused on maintaining status more than those with high completion rates. Retention and success rates for doctoral students have been described as tied to the degree to which students are professionalized—exposed to the rules in play for their specific field of study (Gopaul, 2015). Gardner (2009) recommends successful doctoral programs should (1) be using mentoring to facilitate habits and skills such as self-motivation as well as (2) helping students to publish through coursework: “aligning course assignments and research opportunities so that students engage in the publication process is also necessary” (p. 401).

Places to look for guidance in benchmarks and best practices include doctoral education scholarship in the broader fields of communication and mass communication. In mass communication, Christ and Broyles’s (2008) benchmark study arose from the 2006 Task Force on the Status and Future of Doctoral Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, which surveyed chairs or directors for 39 of 40 AEJMC-affiliated doctoral programs in existence at the time. Participants explained that preparing doctoral students for professional success in academia required, among other factors, research preparation (e.g., coursework, exposure to quantitative and qualitative methods, research assistantships/mentorship), and conference travel funding to present their own research and gain exposure to others’ research. That said, respondents also noted that doctoral students should be prepared for the teaching and service expectations of the tenure-track faculty position. Pardun et al. (2015) investigated the mentoring relationship between advisor and doctoral student by conducting a survey of 241 full professors of journalism and mass communication. The researchers found that senior faculty perceived graduate students as “colleagues in training” more than research assistants (p. 363), and that successful mentor-mentee relationships grew from shared experiences with both participants. By contrast, Neuendorf et al. (2007) found that explicit specialization in specific areas of research was a strength for doctoral programs in communication, which provides support for programs seeking to further define a niche in public relations—and convince colleagues outside of the discipline of the potential value in developing additional tracks within existing programs.

D&I in U.S. Doctoral Education

Public relations faces the challenge of limited diversity in the industry by multiple measures (Bardhan & Gower, 2020; Tindall, 2009a; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017; Wills, 2020) and in higher education (Brown et al., 2011, 2016, 2019; Tindall, 2009b; Waymer, 2012). Public relations has been criticized for a lack of cultural diversity in education and the industry for three decades (Brown et al., 2019; Kern-Foxworth et al., 1994; Len-Rios, 1998; Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Pompper, 2005). As the percentage of Americans identifying as non-white continues to increase (42% in 2020) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), the PR industry continues to lag behind with an estimated 19% PR professionals identifying as non-white (Elasser, 2018; Muturi & Zhu, 2019).

However, the public relations industry has made some progress in its attention and awareness toward D&I. For example, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) recently founded the Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (IPR, 2020); the Diversity Action Alliance (DAA) has created a coalition of diverse communication leaders; and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Educators Academy and chapters across the U.S. have made efforts to support diversity among practitioners and DEI principles in organizations' communication and actions (Blow & Gils Monzón, 2020). While efforts to increase the number of underrepresented groups in the PR profession has been slow, some scholars have indicated that the root problem begins in the classroom, which ultimately affects the industry pipeline (Brown et al., 2011, 2016, 2019). In this environment, some have called on universities and public relations faculty to take a leading role in diversifying the profession (Landis, 2019). Past research has indicated that cultural diversity can be addressed by (1) actively recruiting faculty of color to better reflect the student body, (2) creating more networking and mentoring opportunities, and (3) incorporating D&I within the curricula (Brown et al., 2019; Landis, 2019; CPRE, 2018). Having a diversity of identities among faculty provides role models for more students—as noted in Brown et al.'s (2011) research with Black undergraduates. According to the CPRE report:

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

Unfortunately, doctoral education in PR tends to maintain the current status quo or exacerbate this existing inequity (Gopaul, 2011, 2015). Across academia, faculty of color are consistently underrepresented and face more difficult paths to tenure and promotion (Arnold et al., 2016; Haynes et al., 2020). Public relations doctoral education is often embedded within schools and departments of communication and mass communication, which also face significant D&I issues (e.g., Corrigan & Vats, 2020; Hon et al., 1999; Murthy, 2020; Stephens, 2003). Despite these challenges, the benefits of diverse faculty in the discipline are clear: When faculty and curricula embrace and embody D&I, public relations undergraduate students benefit in improved understanding, increased skills in communicating with diverse publics, and exposure to a wider variety of client work and career opportunities (Bardhan & Gower, 2020; Place & Vanc, 2016).

While race and ethnicity are often at the center of discussions of D&I, any conception of these terms should represent multiple salient facets or categories (e.g., Hon & Brunner, 2000; Mundy, 2015; Pompper, 2007; Sha, 2013). Gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, (dis)ability, international student status, and many other factors must inform any evaluation of and recommendations for doctoral programs (Smith, 2015). As such programs look to play a productive role diversifying faculty, they should keep in mind the challenges of first-generation college students who go on to earn doctoral degrees, including financial challenges, familial pressures, and imposter syndrome, as well as the specific structural discrimination and othering faced by students from underrepresented and historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups (Holley & Gardner, 2012; Waymer, 2012). Additionally, doctoral programs should examine their role and responsibility in preparing future PR faculty leaders who will oftentimes act as the bridge between the industry and the academy to prepare students to have a multicultural perspective. As J. Grunig and L. Grunig (2011) explained, excellence in public relations means having diversity in roles and perspectives that can benefit the organization. Doctoral education clearly has a role to play in driving diversity among faculty and, ultimately, among students and practitioners.

Based on these challenges in public relations education, doctoral education, and D&I, the following research questions explore the current state of U.S. doctoral programs in public relations:

RQ1: Where can students study public relations at the doctoral level in the U.S.?

RQ2: What does the PR curricula look like in U.S.-based doctoral programs in communication and mass communication?

RQ3: How do these curricula align with best practices for U.S. doctoral education?

RQ4: How are D&I reflected in the curricula and policies of doctoral programs in PR?

Method

This study used an exploratory content analysis of U.S.-based doctoral programs in communication and mass communication to address the research questions at hand. The research team gathered data on public relations doctoral programs that were available through the public websites of the departments, schools, and colleges. Based on prior studies by Aldoory and Toth (2000) and Johnson and Ross (2000), the researchers used qualifying criteria for the programs involved in the study. Beginning with initial lists of doctoral-level programs from the National

Communication Association (NCA) and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), 32 programs met two of the following four criteria: (1) a degree in public relations or strategic communication or a track/focus area in public relations or strategic communication (or similar), (2) at least two courses in public relations or strategic communication (i.e. not just a single PR Theory course), (3) at least one current, tenure-track faculty member who has published in public relations journals over the past five years, and (4) at least one current student researching public relations[3]. Data for all 32 programs is provided. The initial list was culled to 25 programs that met three of the four criteria or had four or more public relations researchers as tenure-track faculty members. The second list will be referred to as well-established public relations programs. The universities in the sample represented primarily public, R1 institutions with significant research productivity, as well as several large private institutions. They range in size from just under 10,000 students to more than 50,000.

To better understand these programs, categories for further data collection were determined by best practices for doctoral education (CPRE, 1999) and master's-level education in public relations (CPRE, 2012). To the degree that it was publicly available (via departmental websites and accessible graduate handbooks), the researchers also collected data regarding the degree name, degree specializations (relevant to public relations scholarship), the number of current students researching public relations, the number of listed public relations courses, and the number of public relations tenure-track faculty, as well as several curricular data points: pedagogy courses, research methods, and professional development. Among the challenges faced in collecting these

3 For this step, public relations journals included International Journal of Strategic Communication, Journal of Communication Management, Journal of Public Interest Communications, Journal of Public Relations Research, Journal of Public Relations Education, PR Inquiry, Public Relations Journal, and Public Relations Review.

data were the many variations in definitions to represent similar concepts among students, faculty, and program guidelines. For example, in order to adequately capture the breadth of scholarship constituting public relations, students and faculty were considered public relations researchers if they listed their research interest as *public relations*, *strategic communication* (not exclusively advertising/marketing), *crisis communication*, or *risk communication* or if they actively (within the past five years) published in a public relations journal (i.e. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*). Students and faculty were not included in the sample if their publications were exclusively in advertising, health communication, journalism, marketing, mass communication, media studies, political communication, science communication, social media, or other related communication subfields. Public relations courses reflected a similar definition, including strategic communication, crisis communication, and risk communication, but excluding health communication, communication theory, mass communication theory, etc. Incorporation of D&I language in the graduate handbooks served as an initial way to investigate this category and better understand where public relations theories could be taught.

In order to develop updated criteria for doctoral education in public relations, the researchers utilized a thematic analysis approach to examine and synthesize existing frameworks (e.g., McKinnon, 2014; Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). This included a close reading of the existing frameworks and best practices (as documented in Table 5), which contributed to the verification of existing criteria (CPRE, 1999) and the synthesis of new, literature-driven criteria. These criteria attain resonance (Tracy, 2013) through connecting aforementioned best practices in doctoral education, research and professionalization in academia, public relations pedagogy, and D&I —topics central to the success of doctoral students.

Results

RQ1: Where can students study public relations at the doctoral level?

The results of this investigation found 32 U.S.-based doctoral programs where studying public relations with expert faculty oversight was available, and 25 programs where studying public relations was clearly codified and supported (see Table 3). Programs ranged in their commitment to the discipline and established best practices, but findings supported the notion that there are a variety of options—geographic, interest-specific, and entry point/accessibility—that may allow for growth and expansion of the doctoral faculty pipeline through existing channels. The eight universities with the possibility for the study of public relations did not fit a different profile demographically or geographically, but had fewer faculty members researching public relations and fewer courses focusing on public relations topics. Of the well-established programs, most (17 of 25) only accepted students with master's degrees into the doctoral program. Of the remaining seven, two universities strongly recommended a master's degree, leaving five programs that would admit students regularly with only a bachelor's degree.

Table 3: Analysis of U.S. Public Relations Doctoral Programs

	University	Doctoral Degree Name	PR Track/ Concentration	Number of PR Students ^	Number of PR Faculty ^
1.	Alabama*	Communication & Information Science	Applied Communication	3	8
2.	Central Florida*	Strategic Communication	Risk & Crisis Communication	N/A	5
3.	Colorado-Boulder*	Media Research & Practice	Strategic Communication	4	5
4.	Connecticut	Communication	Marketing Communication	N/A	1
5.	Duquesne*	Rhetoric	IMC; Corporate Communication	N/A	3
6.	Florida*	Mass Communication	Strategic Communication	13	7
7.	George Mason*	Communication	Strategic Communication	N/A	1

8.	Georgia State	Public Communication	Media & Society	N/A	1
9.	Georgia*	Mass Communication	N/A	5	7
10.	Howard	Communication, Culture, & Media Studies	Media Studies	N/A	1
11.	Kentucky*	Communication	Strategic & Organizational Communication	N/A	4
12.	Maryland*	Communication	Public Relations & Strategic Communication	15	6
13.	Miami*	Communication	N/A	13	5
14.	Michigan State	Information & Media	Advertising & Public Relations	2	2
15.	Minnesota*	Mass Communication	Public Relations	N/A	3
16.	Missouri*	Strategic Communication	Strategic Communication	6	3
17.	North Carolina*	Media & Communication	Political, Social, & Strategic Communication	N/A	4
18.	North Carolina State*	Communication, Rhetoric, & Digital Media	Public Relations	N/A	5
19.	North Dakota State	Communication	Organizational Communication	N/A	2
20	Oklahoma*	Mass Communication	Strategic Communication	N/A	3
21.	Oregon*	Media Studies	N/A	4	7
22.	Penn State*	Mass Communication	Strategic Communications	7	5
23.	Purdue*	Communication	Public Relations	N/A	3
24.	South Carolina*	Mass Communication	N/A	4	7
25.	Syracuse*	Mass Communications	N/A	N/A	6
26.	Temple	Media & Communication	Global Media, Social Change, & Activism	2	1
27.	Tennessee*	Communication & Information	Public Relations	N/A	5
28.	Texas	Advertising	N/A	N/A	1

29.	Texas A&M*	Communication	Organizational Communication	N/A	3
30.	Texas Tech*	Media & Communications	Public Relations	5	2
31.	Virginia Commonwealth*	Media, Art, & Text	N/A	0	5
32.	Wayne State*	Communication	Risk, Crisis, & Conflict	1	3

Note: The table reflects available data from each university website during the 2019-2020 academic year. Universities are listed in alphabetical order (not in ranking order).

*These universities represent "well-established" PR programs that meet at least three of the four criteria.

^ Ph.D. students and tenure-track faculty were considered public relations researchers if they listed their research interest as *public relations*, *strategic communication* (not exclusively advertising/marketing), *crisis communication*, or *risk communication* **or** if they actively (within the past five years) published in a public relations journal (*International Journal of Strategic Communication*, J*ournal of Communication Management*, *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, *Journal of Public Relations Education*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *PR Inquiry*, *Public Relations Journal*, *Public Relations Review*)

The 25 established public relations doctoral programs included a variety of degree names, the most common being *mass communication* (eight programs) and *communication* (six programs), as well as several instances of *strategic communication* and *media & communication*. This represents, in part, the historic split between programs paired with (for example) interpersonal communication and rhetoric in contrast to those connected to schools of journalism and mass communication (Wright, 2011). Within these, a variety of degree specializations or tracks represented the preferred coursework for public relations students. These included *applied communication*, *corporate communication*, *public relations*, and *strategic communication*, among others. Data on current doctoral students was not publicly available for many programs, but among those where it was, established programs averaged 4.7 currently enrolled doctoral students researching public relations. These programs had up to 13 students and between one and eight faculty members researching public relations and related topics. Even among the established programs, many had very few enrolled students listing specializations or a research focus in public relations, which may point to a problematic lack of recruitment or faculty focus in relevant areas.

Table 4: Curriculum Requirements in U.S. Public Relations Doctoral Programs

	University	Required Proseminar	Required Methods	Required Teaching	Number of PR courses^	PR Course in Global, International, or Culture
1.	Alabama*	Yes	Yes	No	4	No
2.	Central Florida*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	No
3.	Colorado-Boulder*	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	No
4.	Connecticut	Yes	Yes	No	3	No
5.	Duquesne*	No	Yes	Yes	4	No
6.	Florida*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	Yes
7.	George Mason*	No	Yes	No	4	No
8.	Georgia State	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	Yes
9.	Georgia*	No	Yes	No	4	No
10.	Howard	Yes	Yes	No	1	Yes
11.	Kentucky*	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	No
12.	Maryland*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	Yes
13.	Miami*	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A
14.	Michigan State	Yes	Yes	No	0	No
15.	Minnesota*	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	No
16.	Missouri*	Yes	Yes	No	1	No
17.	North Carolina*	Yes	Yes	No	2	No
18.	North Carolina State*	Yes	Yes	Yes	0	N/A
19.	North Dakota State	No	Yes	Yes	1	No
20	Oklahoma*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	Yes
21.	Oregon*	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	No
22.	Penn State*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	No

23.	Purdue*	Yes	Yes	No	5	No
24.	South Carolina*	No	Yes	Yes	5	No
25.	Syracuse*	Yes	Yes	No	2	No
26.	Temple	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	No
27.	Tennessee*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	No
28.	Texas	No	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
29.	Texas A&M*	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	No
30.	Texas Tech*	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	Yes
31.	Virginia Commonwealth*	N/A	Yes	N/A	0	No
32.	Wayne State*	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	No

*These universities represent "well-established" PR programs that meet at least two of the four criteria.

^ Public relations courses reflected courses with titles such as *public relations*, *strategic communication*, *crisis communication*, and *risk communication*, but excluded those focused solely on advertising, communication theory, heath communication, marketing, mass communication, theory, etc.

RQ2: What do PR curricula look like in U.S.-based doctoral programs in communication and mass communication?
RQ3: How do these curricula align with best practices for U.S. doctoral education?

From a curricular perspective, the doctoral programs reviewed in this sample shared many similarities and reflected many existing best practices. For example, all programs for which assistantship information was available provided opportunities for gaining teaching experience. Additionally, each program required students to take at least one research methods course. At a baseline level, this ensured that doctoral students have the tools to develop humanistic or social science research skills, but it does not mean they have a deep exposure to public relations scholarship. Proseminars or similar professionalization courses were part of the curriculum for 19 of the 25 well-established programs and six of the eight other universities. Fourteen of 25 established programs and five of the eight other programs required a course in pedagogy (in several cases, combined with the professionalization course). Taken together, programs are prioritizing the research training aspect of doctoral work, but several may be potentially underemphasizing pedagogy and professionalization.

Public relations courses varied widely from program to program with *public relations theory* and *crisis communication* being the most popular. Well-established programs included 18 that offered more than one course specifically focused on public relations or related content, averaging just under 3.5 courses per university, with several not clearly having a relevant subject matter course listed. Even with these offerings, it was not clear that many doctoral students would have regular access to a sequence of regular public relations courses, even at several established programs. This was even more apparent at the other eight programs, which had up to three courses listed—most having just one.

RQ 4: How is D&I reflected in the curricula and policies of doctoral programs in PR?

D&I were evaluated in two ways: curricula and policies (see Table 4). First, curricula were examined by searching for a course in public relations with a focus on global PR, international PR, or culture in PR. For the 32 programs listed, 30 had accessible lists of courses offered. Of those 30, six had a course that reflected one of these three areas. Policies addressing D&I were examined by searching graduate handbooks for relevant content. Among programs where graduate handbooks were publicly available (19 of 32), only one included a formal diversity statement while two others referenced D&I as part of the program's vision or values. For the other 16 programs, D&I terms only appeared as part of faculty research or grievance procedures. Despite the limitations of the data, it was evident that, on the whole, doctoral programs still did not demonstrate visible, tangible commitments to D&I through policies or courses—two straightforward avenues for such action.

Discussion & Implications

Scholars have pointed to challenges in the pipeline of doctoral programs generating graduates with expertise in public relations research (e.g., Botan & Taylor, 2004; Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Wright, 2011; Wright & Flynn, 2017), but these data support a more optimistic view. Students interested in pursuing a doctorate in public relations have more options than many faculty members might realize. That said, existing doctoral programs in communication and mass communication demonstrate openness to public relations and strategic communication scholarship, but not always with the depth necessary to provide a thorough understanding of existing research and theory in the discipline as part of scholars' development. There is still, seemingly, a chicken-and-egg problem: Doctoral programs need more public relations faculty to teach additional public relations courses and move into administrative roles, but those new faculty cannot be trained without existing faculty in these programs. The crucial next step may not be establishing new doctoral programs, but rather ensuring that existing programs with the potential for growth in the public relations area (1) codify and formalize public relations and strategic communication tracks and courses, and (2) expand their use of existing best practices. Additionally, the findings point to possibilities for expanding access and inclusivity to improve D&I along multiple criteria. As the structures of doctoral education tend to magnify (rather than reduce) such inequity, doctoral programs must be proactive in addressing them (Gopaul, 2011).

What might these best practices look like? Beginning with the framework of the CPRE (1999; 2012) and supplementing with additional best practices from extant literature on doctoral pedagogy, the authors identified seven core competencies for public relations doctoral programs (Table 5). This includes three recommendations based on CPRE master's-level recommendations (2012) and doctoral-level recommendations

(1999): attaining (1) a deep knowledge of public relations research and theories, (2) advanced methodological training, and (3) pedagogical training. The findings and review of relevant literature led to four additional, emergent recommendations: (1) professionalization training to be a successful faculty member, (2) mentoring and networking support, (3) a clear, codified area or track for public relations doctoral studies, and (4) active, explicit support and metrics for D&I.

Table 5: U.S. Public Relations Doctoral Program Competencies

Public Relations Ph.D. Program Competencies	**Sources**
1. Deep knowledge of public relations research and theories*	CPRE, 2012; CPRE, 1999
2. Advanced social science methodology training (quantitative or qualitative)*	Christ & Boyles, 2008; CPRE, 2012; CPRE, 1999
3. Public relations classroom pedagogy*	CPRE, 2012; CPRE, 1999
4. **New #1: Professionalization/preparation for faculty positions**	Christ & Boyles, 2008; CPRE, 1999
5. **New #2: Prioritizing mentoring and networking among public relations scholars**	Gardner, 2009; Pardun et al., 2018; Saffer, 2015; Waymer, 2012
6. **New #3: Established "area" or "track" for PR/strategic communication**	Neuendorf et al., 2007
7. **New #4: Active support and metrics for diversity and inclusion**	Brown et al., 2011; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Murthy, 2020; Murturi & Zhu, 2019; Tindall, 2009b; Waymer, 2012

**Adapted from CPRE, 2012 recommendations for PR master's degree programs.*

Programs that develop successful doctoral graduates focus on research expertise as well as pedagogical preparation, but they must also address the professional development needs of today's graduate students—who may not always have the opportunity to learn about how to succeed as tenure-track faculty members on the job (Gardner, 2009; Gopaul, 2015; Holley & Gardner, 2012). Doctoral students need exposure to networks of researchers in order to secure tenure-track positions and build new partnerships for research (Saffer, 2015). Additionally, for public relations doctoral programs to thrive and grow, they should further establish themselves as clear, demarcated spaces as part of broader doctoral programs (Neuendorf et al., 2007). While the results indicated that many mass communication and communication doctoral programs have the potential to train public relations doctoral students, many fewer programs had public relations or strategic communication as an explicit area or track, and few had an assortment of public relations courses listed. Such codification works to prevent the loss of valuable programs when faculty retire or leave institutions, as well as to ensure opportunities at the doctoral level are clearly advertised to potential students. Programs must help students build their scholarly identities, nurture relationships within existing programs (among students and between students and faculty), and facilitate external networks with other graduate students and researchers in the field (Sweitzer, 2009; Wulff et al., 2004).

Finally, as D&I have been clearly outlined as significant challenges in communication and mass communication, more doctoral programs (including those in public relations) must begin the process of developing and integrating policies and curricula that support D&I in recruitment, graduate student policies, pedagogical training, exposure to theory and research, and—maybe most importantly—in visible support for doctoral students. To say that programs must begin this process is certainly not a slight to the exceptional scholarship and efforts of many faculty to bring D&I to the center of public relations research and pedagogy (e.g., Bardhan & Gower, 2020; Mundy, 2015; Place & Vanc, 2016; Pompper, 2007; Tindall, 2009b; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010; Waymer, 2012), but it reflects the lack of institutionalization of these values in the structures and processes that frame the doctoral experience. While rules or policies—written and unwritten—may shape the doctoral student experience, it is the faculty, graduate directors, and administrators who have the power and obligation to reshape these rules with an eye toward improving D&I (Gopaul, 2015). As the 2017 CPRE report notes, D&I efforts will be successful in the public relations profession when there is change at the educational level in terms of diversifying faculty, students, and changing the way we teach.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As an exploratory study using publicly-available program data, this research has several limitations, a number of which point toward future directions for scholarship. This research does not address a range of important questions for U.S.-based doctoral education in the PR discipline: What challenges do today's public relations doctoral students and doctoral faculty face? What do these groups see as areas of opportunity or improvement? What do both groups see as obstacles and opportunities for increasing D&I in the public relations faculty pipeline? Additional qualitative research could further explore these questions to deepen insights about best practices and better grapple with perceived barriers. While labyrinthian institutional requirements and processes for course changes and updates may explain some of this variety, it is clear that (1) no two programs are alike or include the same offerings, and (2) many graduate courses may exist that are never or rarely taught. The researchers attempted to investigate several other categories and factors, but the data was not publicly available for many programs. These included assistantship funding, program graduation data and placements, dissertation topics, and the knowledge or visibility of currently enrolled students and their research interests. Additional granular data must be collected to investigate how and whether the programs that provide the infrastructure for developing public relations doctoral students are fulfilling that potential, as well as to identify additional obstacles for student success. In particular, publicly available data related to D&I from a policy perspective was scarce. As it stands now, PR educators are not equipping students with D&I knowledge and skills (CPRE, 2018). Therefore, more research is needed to examine how doctoral programs can contribute to diversifying the PR curricula, recruit and fully support diverse faculty and students, and improve the overall school-to-work pipeline. Future research should consider generating additional data through surveys and interviews to more fully address these questions.

Conclusion

The discipline of public relations can only grow and thrive if an established pipeline consistently generates a diverse group of scholars that values the theories, questions, and approaches that answer a shared set of questions. This is not to say that public relations scholars should aim to replicate themselves or to only seek others like them (Toth, 2010), but that there is value in codifying the discipline and clarifying best practices to guard against contraction, confusion, or dilution. Building more robust public relations faculty units within specific doctoral programs helps to provide more opportunities for growth and development, as well as to strengthen ties and fill structural holes within the doctoral learning network (Saffer, 2015). Established programs develop and refine the curricula, courses, and specializations needed to prepare future faculty in public relations. More U.S. doctoral programs can and should move toward formalizing public relations tracks, as well as defining and measuring goals and strategies to increase D&I among faculty and doctoral students. In doing so, those managing the training and professional socialization of doctoral students must also assume the responsibility of limiting the transference of engrained inequities (Gopaul, 2011). The public relations industry's lack of diversity is an area of growing concern and professional focus, but little improvement (Bardhan & Gower, 2020). This represents an industry-wide problem and numerous studies are pointing to education as the catalyst and leader for change (Brown et al., 2019; CPRE, 2018; Pompper, 2005). Improving D&I for students in public relations doctoral programs is an important part of this larger project.

Public relations is rich with a growing number undergraduate students. The discipline's research is increasing in stature and eminently practical beyond the academy. As this exploratory study indicates, U.S. PR doctoral education is well positioned to continue its growth alongside the demand for practitioners, undergraduate majors, and faculty. Scholars must take advantage of this opportunity to further establish and formalize these successful practices—as well as to prioritize changing those that have been less successful to improve D&I for future scholars and scholarship.

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Public Relations Doctoral Program Webpages

1.	Alabama*	https://cis.ua.edu/cis-doctoral-program/
2.	Central Florida*	https://www.ucf.edu/degree/strategic-communication-phd/
3.	Colorado-Boulder*	https://www.colorado.edu/cmci/aprd/phd
4.	Connecticut	https://comm.uconn.edu/grad/phd/#
5.	Duquesne*	https://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/liberal-arts/academics/departments-and-centers/communication-and-rhetorical-studies/graduate-programs/phd-in-rhetoric
6.	Florida*	https://www.jou.ufl.edu/graduate/phd/
7.	George Mason*	https://communication.gmu.edu/programs/la-phd-com
8.	Georgia State	https://communication.gsu.edu/public-communication/
9.	Georgia*	https://grady.uga.edu/academics/ph-d-degree-program/
10.	Howard	https://communications.howard.edu/index.php/ccms/
11.	Kentucky*	http://ci.uky.edu/grad/phd-communication
12.	Maryland*	http://www.comm.umd.edu/graduate/overview
13.	Miami*	https://com.miami.edu/phd-communication/
14.	Michigan State	https://comartsci.msu.edu/academics/academic-departments/advertising-public-relations-journalism-media-information/graduate
15.	Minnesota*	https://hsjmc.umn.edu/graduate/degree-programs/phd-mass-communication
16.	Missouri*	https://communication.missouri.edu/graduate-program

17.	North Carolina*	http://hussman.unc.edu/phd
18.	North Carolina State*	https://crdm.chass.ncsu.edu/
19.	North Dakota State	https://www.ndsu.edu/communication/programs/doctoral_program/
20	Oklahoma*	https://www.ou.edu/gaylord/graduate/ph-d
21.	Oregon*	https://journalism.uoregon.edu/academics/graduate-programs/media-studies-phd
22.	Penn State*	https://www.bellisario.psu.edu/graduate/ph.d.-in-mass-communications
23.	Purdue*	https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/communication/graduate/areasofstudy/publicrelations.html
24.	South Carolina*	https://www.sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/cic/academic_programs/phd/mass_communication_phd/
25.	Syracuse*	https://newhouse.syr.edu/academics/mass-communications/
26.	Temple	https://klein.temple.edu/academics/media-and-communication-doctoral-program
27.	Tennessee*	https://cci.utk.edu/phdprogram
28.	Texas	https://advertising.utexas.edu/graduate/advertising-phd-program
29.	Texas A&M*	https://liberalarts.tamu.edu/communication/graduate/about-the-doctoral-program/
30.	Texas Tech*	http://www.depts.ttu.edu/comc/graduate/phd/
31.	Virginia Commonwealth*	https://robertson.vcu.edu/graduate/strategic-public-relations/
32.	Wayne State*	http://comm.wayne.edu/phd/index.php

*These universities represent "well-established" PR programs that meet three of the four criteria.

Appendix

Program Qualifying Criteria:
32 programs met at least 2/4 (potential), 25 met at least 3/4 (well established)

1. A degree or a track/focus area in public relations or strategic communication (or similar)
2. A curriculum (at least two) courses in public relations or strategic

communication

3. At least one current, tenure track faculty member who has published in public relations journals* in the past five years (or self-identifies as a PR researcher^ in their university bio)

4. At least one current Ph.D. student researching public relations or strategic communication, defined by publishing in public relations journals* or by self-identifying as a PR/stratcomm researcher^ in their university bio

* “Public relations journals” were defined as the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journal of Public Relations Education*, *PR Inquiry*, *Public Relations Journal*, and *Public Relations Review*.

^ Self-identified research topics included *public relations*, *strategic communication* (not exclusively advertising/marketing), *crisis communication*, or *risk communication*.

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TEACHING BRIEF

Teaching Race and Cultural Sensitivity in Public Relations: The Case of Comic Relief and the Western Savior Ideology

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ABSTRACT

In the following teaching brief, we undertake the task of providing a means for public relations educators to talk about diversity, race, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. We know that educators are asked to teach about these matters; yet, many of them do not have adequate resources from which to draw. So, we provide one such teaching brief. This teaching brief centers on the case of Comic Relief and its perpetuation of the Western Savior Ideology. It then takes readers through the experience of how Comic Relief evolved its approach after public outcry. We have provided critical questions and an essay question an instructor can use to facilitate discussion about and to assess, subsequently, student learning on diversity issues in public relations.

Keywords: nonprofit communication, comic relief, diversity, race, public relations education, international PR

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In this age of heightened awareness about issues of social justice in the U.S. and abroad, it is becoming evident that if we are going to more fully prepare our students to enter the profession and be successful practitioners, we must address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, whiteness, privilege, and social injustice in the classroom and overall curriculum (Waymer, 2020). As Flowers (2020) noted, several scholars in the discipline have called for greater intercultural, multicultural, diversity, and international skills and competency for public relations students in the U.S. (Bardhan, 2003; Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Taylor, 2001; Tsetsura, 2011; Waymer, 2012a, 2012b; Waymer & Brown, 2018; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). Likewise, the Commission on Public Relations Education (2019), has recognized the centrality of diversity to public relations education—and has "encouraged it—one might say, *mandated* it (emphasis in original)—with new standards for accreditation of schools of journalism/mass communication and certification of public relations programs" (para. 3). In light of current events in our world and the Commission on Public Relations Education's (CPRE) mandate, the time and opportunity are ripe for public relations education scholars to address diversity matters and racial justice more fully.

We know that educators are asked to teach about these matters; yet, many of them do not have adequate resources from which to draw. In the following teaching brief, we undertake the task of addressing diversity matters and racial justice more fully. After or as part of a PR unit on intercultural communication, diversity, or global public relations, the instructor should introduce the following case. It is best to use this case after the instructor has conducted at least one lecture or seminar on the topics of diversity, intercultural communication, or global public relations so students are at least familiar with concepts used to discuss these matters. At a minimum, if an instructor has no resources from which to draw, the instructor can assign for reading and discussion CPRE's

(2019) statement on diversity that details four critical definitions (of diversity, culture, segmentation, and stereotypes) and expected outcomes of diversity education in public relations.

STEP ONE: ensure the discussion on diversity in public relations has taken place with students. This sets the stage if faculty want to use the Comic Relief case study to facilitate teaching and discussion of diversity in public relations. The remainder of the case analysis should be covered over at least two class sessions (50-minute or 75-minute sessions).

To familiarize instructors with the case and to demonstrate why it is suitable for teaching diversity matters in public relations, we introduce the case of Comic Relief and provide adequate context for instructors to see its relevance and pedagogical potential.

Assigning and Teaching the Comic Relief Case

In a subsequent class, STEP TWO is to introduce the case of Comic Relief. Have students read about Comic Relief. Also allow them about five minutes to peruse the organization's website https://www.comicrelief.com/. After students have read about the history and mission of Comic Relief and have spent 5 minutes reviewing its website, STEP THREE is to have students read the following news articles in class. The first is written by Sarah Young (2019), and the second was written by Kitty Wenham-Ross (2019). Also have the students read Comic Relief's (2019) response to this situation on Twitter. Students should take about 20 minutes to read both news articles and Comic Relief's brief statement issued on Twitter. Once students are finished reading these items, the instructor should ask Reflection Question 1 and then later Reflection Question 2 located at the end of this teaching brief. These questions should drive conversation with students for the remainder of the class session. At the end of the class session, after students have engaged in instructor-facilitated dialogue around Reflection Questions 1 and 2 above, the instructor assigns for homework the following readings to be completed before the next class session.

STEP FOUR sets the stage for what happens during the next class session and marks the beginning and in some instances the continuation of tough discussions of diversity issues in public relations. These are the assigned readings: Charity So White's (2020) blog entry detailing its newfound partnership with Comic Relief; Pragya Agarwal's (2019) news article/critique that highlights discriminatory language, ideals, and policies nonprofits use as they work with and describe the racially underrepresented communities that are the recipients or targets of their charity; Charity So White's (2021a, b, c, d, e, f) Our Story, Our Vision, Our Calls to Action, Our Values, How We Talk, and Defining Racism pages on its website; Cipriani's (2020) article that announces Comic Relief's decision to hire new director of fundraising, Fatima Ribeiro; Comic Relief's (2020a) press release that announces its decision to hire African directors to work on international appeal films and its (2020b) press release that reflects its attempts to address racial inequity; and finally Sandhu's (2020) article detailing Comic Relief's decision to stop using images of starving children in Africa for Red Nose Day events. All links are hyperlinked above.

STEP FIVE asks the instructor at the beginning of class to ask an open-ended question that solicits student feedback about their initial response to the assigned readings. Let this conversation and dialogue take place for about 10 minutes. Finally, the instructor should facilitate discussion further around the more structured questions: Reflection Questions 3 and 4.

STEP SIX allows the instructor the opportunity to assess student learning. The instructor can assign Reflection Question 5 as a short essay to be turned in at a later date, or if the instructor does not want to assess student learning for this unit or case example, the instructor can simply ask Question 5 during the same class period as the instructor asked Questions

3 and 4. Regardless of the approach to assessment the instructor takes, after completing this case analysis and discussion, students should be able to determine how well Comic Relief, via its public relations, was able to deal with diversity issues and needs, and they should be able to measure that success against the DEI outcomes prescribed in the CPRE (2019) statement on diversity provided as a supplement to this unit. In short, students get to see how an organization makes attempts to achieve the CPRE's (2019) ideals about what public relations practitioners should be doing to help organizations be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive—as the commission espouses that "public relations practitioners should be at the forefront in helping organizations respond to these matters" (para. 12).

Now that we have presented specific guidelines for introducing the topic, this case, and facilitating discussion about this case and diversity issues in public relations, we turn to providing more in-depth details about the case for background and context for instructors.

Comic Relief Case Background and Context

Comic Relief, based in the United Kingdom, is one of the most prominent charities in the world. The organization was founded in 1985 by British comedian, Lenny Henry, and comedy writer, Richard Curtis. The organization is known for raising money, via late-night fundraising shows, for those afflicted by a famine in Ethiopia. By 1988, the organization began hosting its first Red Nose Day, a telethon on BBC, which raised more than £15 million euros for tackling poverty during this first event. (Comic Relief, 2013). Many celebrities, musicians, and comedians take part in Red Nose Day each year, and funds raised by the organization are awarded as grants for multiple charities worldwide; the charity has raised more than $1.4 billion since the nonprofit's inception (BBC, 2015; Sandhu, 2020). In addition to live events, Comic Relief fronts a hefty budget for their cause-marketing collateral, which includes informational documentaries, original photography, and footage for their youthful and entertainment-driven social media presence.

In 2019, the charity came under fire for their use of predominantly White British celebrities in their fundraising and advertising campaigns. Simultaneously, claims began to arise about a lack of diversity across the nonprofit sector. In 2020, Comic Relief made the risky decision to completely eliminate the emotional, “tear-jerking” marketing tactic used by several other charities worldwide, and instead they pursued an unprecedented approach. The changes they made both internally and externally not only reflected the success of a company reinventing their marketing strategy, but they also provided a new framework for other nonprofit organizations seeking to integrate greater levels of diversity and agency at the local level.

Students likely are not familiar with the events of 2019 that damaged Comic Relief’s reputation nor are they likely familiar with the actions Comic Relief took in 2020 to address the criticisms and threats to its legitimacy. These factors make it a solid, non-US centric case to discuss and interrogate diversity and public relations.

Comic Relief Campaigns in Crisis

On February 27, 2019, Strictly Comes Dancing champion Stacey Dooley posted a photo to Instagram from Uganda, where she was working on a documentary with Comic Relief. In the photo, the redheaded media personality was cradling a small African child, with his fingers in his mouth and his eyes averted from the camera. The photo was captioned, “OB.SESSSSSSSSSSED”; it was also one of several similar posts made as part of the documentary’s marketing material. Within minutes, the internet blew up, full of belligerent social media users accusing Dooley of a “Western Savior complex” and begging her to take the photo down. Member of Parliament, David Lammy instigated the onslaught with a tweet, reading:

The world does not need any more white saviours. As I’ve said

> before, this just perpetuates tired and unhelpful stereotypes. Let's instead promote voices from across the continent of Africa and have serious debate (Young, 2019 paras. 3-5).

Immediately, Comic Relief was thrust into the spotlight, as social media users scrutinized the organization's previous fundraising materials and use of celebrity influencers to promote their causes—a key aspect of their cause-marketing strategy. An earlier documentary from 2017 resurfaced, showing singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran trying to quickly pull money from his own wallet to front the cost of a hotel for two homeless children in Liberia. This documentary was called "poverty porn" (para. 1) by aid watchdog groups (McVeigh, 2017), and Sheeran and the organization were accused of using an emotional marketing appeal that sacrificed the dignity of the children pictured and painted a limited narrative where Sheeran was the leading character coming to the rescue (McVeigh, 2017). Other photos used as promotional material by Comic Relief showed media personalities Ben Shephard and Fearne Cotton handing out Malaria nets in Uganda—two smiling celebrities in a sea of otherwise sad faces (Wenham-Ross, 2019). Many social media users were outraged.

Comic Relief's Response

Comic Relief used Twitter to issue a response almost instantaneously after Lammy's tweet. Instead of apologizing for Dooley's actions or their own, the organization expressed gratitude that Dooley "agreed to go to Uganda to discover more about the projects the British people have generously funded, and (we) make no apologies for this" (Comic Relief, 2019, para. 1). Further, Comic Relief expressed that they had offered David Lammy an opportunity to help them with their filming efforts, and he had not taken them up on the offer; however, "Lammy said it was "simply not true" that he had not responded to the offer, adding he had held two meetings with the organization" and that Comic relief "had "fallen short" of what he called its "public duty" to promote racial equality and serve minority communities" (Badshah, 2019, para. 5). Publics' feelings toward Comic Relief's response were divided as the story circulated around the United Kingdom and beyond. Some threatened to pull their aid from British charities altogether, while others emphasized that Comic Relief and the celebrities the organization used in their public relations efforts were not at fault for using what influence they had for a good cause.

Lack of Diversity in the Third Sector

Charity So White (2021d) used the spotlight around issues of racial insensitivity and inequality given to the third sector to make their case that a lack of diversity at the management level of nonprofit organizations and unaddressed issues of institutional racism account for the minimal or stereotypical representation of people in developing countries seen in marketing materials. Charity So White was formed just three months after Comic Relief's crisis with Stacey Dooley, and Charity So White's hashtag trended on Twitter as thousands of racial and ethnically underrepresented persons shared their experiences of exclusion while working in or with the charity sector. At the center of the outrage was training materials used by a charity named Citizens Advice and its guidelines for working with Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) communities; these guidelines were based on racist stereotypes about these communities being a "cash-centric culture," having "low literacy levels," and their having a fondness for "gender discrimination." Citizens Advice presumed these stereotypical characteristics to be prevalent in these underrepresented cultures (Agarwal, 2019). Charity So White emphasized that these stereotypes could affect funding for charities led by racially and ethnically underrepresented persons working on the ground in developing countries, especially when third sector leadership demonstrated an inherent lack of diversity and racial insensitivity.

The Transformation of Comic Relief

Many had moved past Comic Relief's crisis by August of 2019, accepting their statement about Stacey Dooley as well-intentioned naivety. Yet, the leadership at Comic Relief stayed engaged in the conversations happening in the third sector, and the leadership began to meet and strategize with the team at Charity So White at the end of 2019 about how Comic Relief could better represent and support communities in the countries, specifically developing African countries, where they had proverbial boots on the ground for their humanitarian efforts. Comic Relief planned strategic changes over the course of the next 18 months, and the result was a new cause-marketing and promotional strategy—one designed to minimize the Western savior ideology in their communication, and the angles with which they framed life in other cultures.

Changing Internal Leadership

While the leadership team at Comic Relief sought to transform their external communication strategy, they first looked inward for a new candidate to fill the role of Executive Director of Fundraising and Creative—the head of their integrated marketing efforts. In August of 2020, they selected Fatima Ribeiro. Ribeiro is a Muslim woman of Portuguese and Gujarati descent who served as marketing director for the nonprofit Islamic Relief over a span of five years; furthermore, Ribeiro received awards for her Ramadan fundraising campaigns, including Third Sector Marketing Campaign of the year in 2019 (Third Sector, 2019). Choosing Ribeiro for the job brought to the organization the perspective of a woman from a culturally diverse background whose stated mission and prior work experiences were focused on helping others understand the beliefs and values of marginalized communities. For example, in her previous Ramadan campaigns for Islamic Relief, she featured references to a verse from the Qur'an splashed on the sides of buses across the UK; the marketing message generated traffic from those outside the Muslim faith to their website. Many persons from those outside the Muslim faith, out of curiosity, looked up the references, and several gained a greater understanding of the month of Ramadan and its significance to those taking part in the spiritual ritual (Ahmed, 2019; Third Sector, 2019). Hiring Ribeiro can be seen as Comic Relief's newfound commitment to inclusiveness in their storytelling and marketing techniques.

Prioritizing Local Voices and Creating New Influencers

After Ribeiro's hiring, the first external decision Comic Relief made in October of 2020 was to stop sending British celebrities, like Dooley, to African countries as influencers. The charity decided to remove footage of starving and ill children from their documentaries, even though that particular tactic was considered effective because it successfully elicited emotion from stakeholders who often gave money to support needy children (Sandhu, 2020); however, such imagery did not provide a more accurate representation of development on the continent as a whole. To adequately portray life in the countries where they operated, Comic Relief announced plans to bring members of communities on air as storytellers, captured by local filmmakers and photographers. In a press release dispatched on October 28, 2020 by Comic Relief, President and co-founder, Sir Lenny Henry stated:

> African people don't want us to tell their stories for them, what they need is more agency, a platform and partnership. I have seen first-hand what it means for African communities to see someone who looks just like them in charge of directing films. (Comic Relief, 2020a, para. 12)

Furthermore, Kenyan filmmaker and director of one of Comic Relief's newest documentaries, Eugene Muigai, added:

> This opportunity makes people like us feel like we are finally being listened to. For so long we've seen people tell our stories, misinterpreting intentions, beliefs and the values we hold. It has

led to a loss of culture and pride among our people. (Comic Relief, 2020a, para. 17)

Comic Relief also announced that high profile supporters could continue to play an influential role in entertaining and narrating during their Red Nose Day telethons, and they could continue appearing in and supporting other marketing materials created in the United Kingdom; however, the representation of Africans and African culture would be led by members and directors of those local communities. Comic Relief followed these decisions with an online event, releasing three new films from Kenyan filmmakers tackling the difficult topics of mental health, climate change, and child marriage (Comic Relief, 2020a).

Conclusion

While Comic Relief's initial response to 'White Savior' criticisms was deflective and unapologetic, the organizational changes made in the following 18 months reveal time spent listening and seeking to understand the responsibility given to the third sector to help facilitate storytelling. The result is a series of initiatives which set a new precedent for charities with a substantial level of exposure, including changes to the marketing tactics they use. Comic Relief's CEO, Ruth Davidson, emphasized that despite the radical changes to the organization's practices, they still knew that they could maximize their efforts to fund those in need and reduce donor fatigue, by showing the ways that developing countries across the world are changing for the better. Davidson stated, "what prompts people to give is an emotional connection—that doesn't have to be pity. It can be joy, it can be anger, it can be a sense of positivity and hope" (Sandhu, 2020, para. 6). All of the organization's changes—including the broadcasting of their localized films—will be on full display in March of 2021, with their internationally acclaimed and televised Red Nose Day.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you believe that Comic Relief did anything wrong in their initial

response to criticisms of perpetuating the Western Savior ideology? Why or why not?

2. Given the backlash, in retrospect what specifically could Comic Relief's public relations team have done differently in their initial response to backlash for Dooley's photo?

3. Given your knowledge of diversity issues in public relations, how could a more nuanced understanding of cultural sensitivity, diversity, equity, inclusion, or race have allowed Comic Relief to execute a better humanitarian campaign?

4. What are alternative ways that influencers can aid in promoting a nonprofit organization to their audiences without taking the spotlight off of local efforts?

5. Evaluate Comic Relief's decisions to change course, to partner with Charity So White, to hire Fatima Ribeiro as Executive Director of Fundraising and Creative, and to change how they created campaigns—by using local filmmakers and photographers for example. Share your evaluation and thoughts.

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TEACHING BRIEF

Business Acumen: Proposal Writing in the Student Firm

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ABSTRACT

This teaching brief presents an experiential learning assignment that enables undergraduate students who work in a student firm to develop business literacy, soft skills and hard skills such as persuasive writing and cost estimating. The Commission on Public Relations Education reported agreement among employers that it is important for entry-level practitioners to have business acumen, and that such knowledge is lacking (Commission Report, 2018, p. 56). This entrepreneurial learning activity helps to address a gap between what the typical public relations curriculum offers and the business skills and knowledge that employers value, particularly in agencies.

Keywords: soft skills, public relations, advertising, entrepreneurship

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In many student firms, students assume the responsibility for bringing in clients, both pro-bono and fee-for-service. Winning new client accounts is a daunting challenge for many students, and it offers a rich opportunity for learning how the agency industry operates, gaining basic financial knowledge and developing soft skills such as listening, teamwork, flexibility and being assertive.

The complex effort also helps students develop an entrepreneurial mindset, which may be helpful given that today's students are graduating into a "gig" economy, a self-employment trend that appears to be accelerating in the U.S. and elsewhere (Alton, 2018). The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not offer current data on independent contractors, but a McKinsey Global Institute study found that between 20% to 30% of working-age adults in the U.S. and Europe engaged in some form of independent work (Manyika et al., 2016).

In an agency, developing new business requires identifying, researching and meeting with a potential client, asking good questions, listening carefully and probing to assess the client's situation. It requires determining the services that can help the client achieve its business goals, developing a scope of work, estimating costs based on the time required to do the work (and outside costs), and writing a persuasive business proposal. Agency professionals must present the proposal, respond to the client's feedback and persuade the client to hire the firm.

In one student firm, the instructor developed an ungraded assignment that would help students develop these skills as they worked to bring in new clients. For the assignment, students would need to develop cost estimates based on the number of hours that would be required to produce deliverables, plan events or post on social media throughout the semester, for example. Students were required to read several chapters of The Art of Client Service to deepen their understanding of pricing and billable time (Soloman, 2016). To lay the groundwork, the advisor introduced the concept of billable hours and presented the financial calculations that agencies use to determine an employee's productivity. This information helped students understand agency operations and profitability, and to view the time they spent in the student firm as billable. The advisor also helped students understand their monetary value to agencies if they decided to intern or work at an agency after graduation.

As learning objectives, the instructor aimed for students to:

- Understand the concept of billable time and see themselves as professionals whose skills and abilities contribute to an agency's profitability.
- Learn how to identify a new business opportunity, set up a business meeting and meet face-to-face with a potential client.
- Learn to frame questions and listen carefully in a meeting to determine a client's situation and business goals.
- Define the specific strategic communication deliverables services that would help a client achieve its business goals, and the metrics for evaluating outcomes.
- Develop a detailed scope of work for a client and assess the amount of time that will be required to produce the work. Estimate the cost-range for based on the time required or perceived value of the service.
- Write a persuasive, two- to three-page proposal that includes cost estimates. (For pro bono clients, students were to present the cost estimates as donated).
- Gain experience in presenting a proposal to a client in person, receive client feedback and revise accordingly.

Rationale

Many employers value business literacy in their new hires, and for this reason the Commission on Public Relations Education has urged undergraduate programs to design curricula and experiential learning that help students understand business processes. In a 2013 survey of

Arthur W. Page Society members, Ragas and Culp (2014) found that 85% of participants (*n*=112) indicated that it was "extremely important" for public relations and advertising professionals to have a strong grounding in business fundamentals as part of their education and training. They and the Commission on Public Relations Education have recommended adding business concepts to existing, required courses such as public relations management and campaigns, and developing new, stand-alone courses in business fundamentals. A student firm provides another opportunity to introduce business concepts and processes as an experiential, hands-on learning experience.

The Commission reported agreement among employers that it is important for entry-level practitioners to develop business acumen, but such knowledge is lacking (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018). The report provides a vague definition of business acumen: "understanding how business works, to provide the contextual significance of public relations" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018, p. 28).

It is helpful to think about the concept of business acumen a bit differently, and to consider Merriam-Webster's definition of acumen: "keenness and depth of perception, discernment or discrimination, especially in practical matters" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This definition echoes some of the soft skills that researchers have found are important in the workplace.

DiStaso et al. (2009) found agreement among professionals and academics that entry-level public relations employees bring both hard and soft skills to the workplace, and the latter should include creativity, flexibility, initiative, interpersonal skills and the ability to take criticism. Employers across numerous industries have reported that they desire new graduates to be good listeners who are self-aware, adaptable, assertive and collaborative (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2018, p. 55).

According to Windels et al. (2013), vital soft skills in the advertising field include critical thinking, persuasion, interpersonal, verbal communication and presentation ability.

For the training and development field, Gargiulo et al. (2006) wrote a practical guide to developing business acumen and described it as encompassing three critical areas: relational, communication and financial. Relational skills are needed to build and sustain professional, trusting relationships with peers, clients and customers. Communication skills needed for business acumen include writing memos, e-mails, white papers, proposals and presentations. Financial skills include developing budgets and cost estimates.

The proposal-writing assignment helps students develop these relational, communication and financial skills while learning a core business process in the agency industry. Students work in pairs to develop their proposals, engage with clients, and collaborate with teammates to estimate the time required to complete tasks. They must develop listening skills in order to assess a client's situation, needs and concerns. They work on their persuasive communication skills, both verbal and written, that are important for entry-level jobs across industries. Writing a persuasive proposal is a sophisticated and challenging exercise, and students need as much writing experience as possible to be successful in the public relations field. Students learn to develop cost estimates and present basic financial information to clients, and this experience may set them apart from other entry-level practitioners in all types of work settings. By definition, the agency industry exists to serve clients, and clients come and go. The author of this article worked at two mid-sized agencies, and all employees were expected to be alert to new business opportunities and prepared to participate in new business pitches. This assignment helps to prepare students to be valuable members of an agency team right from the start.

The learning experience also helps prepare students for the vagaries of the "gig" economy and those difficult times when they may find themselves unemployed. They learn how to identify a potential client, put a price tag on the deliverables and services they can provide, and follow a formal business process to sell these services.

Learning Outcomes

While an ungraded assignment, students received feedback on the first draft of their proposals. The advisor evaluated the proposals for writing style, in particular clarity and persuasiveness; conventions such as grammar and punctuation; professional formatting; thoroughness in the scope-of-work description; and accuracy for cost estimating.

Several students remarked that the assignment was the most valuable and exciting learning activity of the semester. Many displayed a sense of exhilaration, even joy, when they succeeded in bringing in a new client. The revenue from fee-for-service accounts helped to pay for perks such as student stipends, pizza days and an awards program, and students understood that their entrepreneurial efforts made these benefits possible.

Some students began freelancing while in college, and others developed business cards and websites for freelancing after graduation. The author reached out via LinkedIn to several former students to learn what they may have gained from the experience. One 2017 graduate responded in this way: "I learned to anticipate needs in advance as well [as] develop solutions to meet those needs. It was also a great experience learning business processes at this stage of schooling (introduced me to some real-world learning experiences)." A 2016 graduate who works at a global PR firm wrote:

> That exercise was my first foray into thinking about pricing a service. Goods tend to have an obvious value. Services tend to have a relative value. A lot of what we end up needing to do in pitches is to justify our estimates and the rates we quote our labor

at. The [student firm name withheld] exercise got the gears turning in my head.

This proposal-writing activity is ideally suited to a student firm where students get to work directly with external clients and develop new business. Important relational and interpersonal communication skills are gained from meeting with potential clients and determining their problems and specific needs for strategic communication services. Pitching and presenting the proposals in a business setting caps off the learning experience, as students receive feedback from an actual client (not just the instructor).

Nevertheless, a modified version of the activity could be used in a PR writing or campaigns class with a mock client. One approach could be to present students with a brief that outlines a client problem in detail. Students could then work in teams to develop a persuasive business proposal that addresses the problem and includes cost estimates based on the estimated amount of time required to do the work. Students could role-play the initial meeting with clients, and later the pitch.

Faculty members with agency experience are uniquely qualified to lead the learning activity. Alternatively, an agency professional could be invited in to meet with students, introduce the concept of billable hours and describe the process for new business development.

Whether for an actual or mock client, the proposal-writing activity helps students gain an understanding of business processes as well as develop professional writing skills. It is the type of experiential learning activity that follows recommendations by the Commission on Public Relations Education that the undergraduate curriculum help students gain business acumen before they graduate.

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Assignment
Go Get It! New Business Proposals

Working in pairs, develop a two- to three-page professional proposal after meeting with a potential client.

1. You and your partners will:
   - Talk among yourselves. Determine: What's your passion? What are you into? What's a local business or nonprofit that you like or that you've always wanted to learn about?
   - Try to hone in on a business or nonprofit that you believe would benefit from our services and that you think would be a good fit for a student agency. Other ideas about how to find clients:
     - Find companies whose external communications appear to be weak
     - Find companies that are growing rapidly or that are opening
     - Use your personal network and the firm's existing clients
   - Research the business or nonprofit. Read the mission statement. Study the website. Learn as much as you can.
     - The first few minutes you research a company are when your best ideas will flow. Write them down. Your first impressions are important.
   - You must contact the potential client **this week** to set up a meeting next week, or no later than the following week. Aim to meet with a decision-maker (owner, manager, marketing director, etc.)
     - When you meet, learn the WHY. In other words, why they started the business, or why the organization exists.
     - Connect our values with the client's values. Our values: relationships, ambition, challenge, collaboration, learning. Are we

a good fit?
- Ask good questions.
- Be encouraging. The more they talk, the more you learn.
- Tell them about the student firm.
- Find out what challenges or opportunities they face (so that you can determine whether they would benefit from our services, and which services they really need).

2. The essential question for you to understand before you start drafting the proposal is: *"What challenges and opportunities does this business face?"* If you can find out the answer to this question, your imagination and creativity will take off. As a team, you can then brainstorm and determine the answer to the next essential question: *"What services can we provide that will help this business/nonprofit take advantage of these opportunities and achieve its business objectives?"*

3. Jointly write a proposal. Your proposal should be written in a compelling, conversational, straightforward manner using AP Style. Read pp. 11-121 in The Art of Client Service for guidance. Specify the costs for each element, activity or deliverable that we can provide to help the business/nonprofit achieve its goals.

4. Consult with all the appropriate staff members to get a ballpark estimate of how much time it will take for each person to do his/her particular piece of the project.

5. Include in your proposal any outside costs, such as printing, postage and packaging, and digital or print advertising. If outside costs are impossible to procure or estimate, then include a line that says something like *"Outside costs such as printing, digital advertising, web hosting, etc.*

are not included in the estimate."

6. Your pricing should be based on the amount of time that a project will realistically take, using the rate of $50/hour or $25 for project management. Pricing can also factor in the perceived value of the service or deliverable. For example, a client might be willing to spend much more on a website redesign than on an annual report, even though the projects may require the same amount of time. Be sure to include time for the AE's "project management." This is the time required for weekly phone calls, setting up meetings, problem-solving, delegating work, etc. Project management can be billed at $25/hour.

7. Your estimate should include a brief description of the firm and a convincing "why hire us" statement. You can find good, succinct language on our website.

8. Include your goals for the client project, a detailed description of the scope of work and all the deliverables to be included, cost estimates for each element and total cost, and the estimated timeline for completion. The proposal should end with a thank you and signature line for you and the client to sign and date. It should be concise, written in short paragraphs with headers or sub-heads. Bullets are ok.

9. Write in plain English. A conversational tone is warmer and more inviting.

10. Use professional letter format with the firm's logo, date, client contact's name, title, company name, complete mailing address.

HELPFUL TIPS:

On making phone calls to prospects to set up meetings:

Try to make it a "warm" call rather than a cold call. Warm: "So and so suggested I call you." Make it short. Leverage being a student. Have an elevator pitch ready: "We'd really like to do some work for you. We noticed …. Can we meet … it won't take more than 15 minutes of your time."

The elevator pitch:

Prepare a one-minute pitch that says: This is who I am, this is who the student firm is. This is why I'm here. This is how we can help you. Sound intelligent. Bring solutions. Be prepared to use this on the phone or in a meeting (or maybe on the elevator!).

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TEACHING BRIEF

Crisis Response Plan Group Project

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ABSTRACT

This project allows students to take an important chapter from the course text and apply it to a real-world situation: they create and respond to a hypothetical crisis, based on the information discussed in class and in the text. In doing so, they utilize information literacy, critical thinking, and other analytical skills. Learning objectives, steps and procedures, and assessment information are discussed.

Keywords: bloom's taxonomy, group project, crisis communication, crisis response, crisis management

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Textbooks and case studies can only take students so far in mass communication curricula; the best learning involves experience and application. This may be especially the case for public relations education. While traditional textbook knowledge is important, particularly for beginning PR students, helping those students see the information played out in reality is a great way to ensure actual learning has taken place, rather than simple exposure or memorization. Kolb's (1984) work on Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) posits that learning is a process where knowledge is acquired by experiences. According to this theory, knowledge obtained from successful experiential learning is cyclical, "where the learner 'touches all the bases'—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting—in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned" (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). Nilson (2016) also provides researched-based findings to help understand how students learn best, and suggests that true learning can be achieved by "thinking about the meaning of the new knowledge and connecting it to what [students] already know; …interaction with others; …actively engag[ing] in an activity; …receiv[ing] the new material multiple times but in different ways; …[and] making and correcting mistakes [rather than] being correct in the first place" (Nilson 2016, pp. 4-5).

One subject area that fits naturally with experiential learning methods is crisis management, which is an important part of the overall public relations curriculum. Well-known crisis management researcher and theorist Timothy Coombs (2001) stated that:

> crisis management moves the public relations role to the managerial function and requires the development of many skills and knowledge points… the need for crisis management in practice increases each year as the technology and stakeholders continue to create new crises and pressure how organizations should respond to crises. (p.89)

The internationally recognized accreditation program for public relations practitioners, Accreditation in Public Relations (APR), stresses crisis and issues management as 15% of the knowledge, skills, and abilities tested as part of the examination process (Universal Accreditation Board, 2021). Further, after in-depth interviews with 29 advertising and public relations agency leaders, Neill and Schauster (2015) reported that the necessity of crisis and issues management skills for undergraduates was emphasized 70 different times by 25 of the participants.

The activity described here was designed to foster the learning of crisis management and communication by utilizing an experiential learning method that helps students engage in their own learning, interact with others, and actively, critically think about the material. This project allows students to take an important chapter from the course text and apply it to a real-world situation: they create and respond to a hypothetical crisis, based on the information discussed in class and in the text. In doing so, they utilize information literacy, critical thinking, and other analytical skills.

This project is designed as the second of two main assignments for an introductory public relations class. The first assignment involves cold-calling and interviewing a public relations practitioner who has been in the industry a minimum of five years, and writing and presenting a report about the information learned in that interview. That assignment helps students to understand clearly what public relations is and that a practitioner needs to be knowledgeable of and skillful in an array of areas. Typically, the students in the class are sophomores or juniors who will be starting their PR practicum sequence in the next academic year. This class is their first introduction to the profession, but this assignment takes place in the second half of the semester after learning and being initially assessed on the material needed to complete the assignment.

Learning Objectives

This activity enables students to demonstrate knowledge and application of every step in the crisis management lifecycle, as discussed in class and in the assigned text: chapter 10 of Wilcox et al.'s (2015) *Public Relations: Strategies & Tactics*. Wilcox et al.'s (2015) approach to crisis management involves a lifecycle, where a potential crisis is first identified in the proactive stage, developing crises are planned for in the strategic phase, full-blown crises are responded to in the reactive stage, and reputation damage is assessed and addressed in the recovery stage. The reactive and recovery stages also include applying Benoit's (1995) image restoration strategies.

Students are able to master this new-to-them material through an assignment that caters to a variety of learning styles and applies multiple categories of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom, et al., 1956). Therefore, this activity is designed to achieve six learning objectives (LO):

1. Explain the role public relations plays in responding to a crisis.
2. Explain the four phases of the conflict management life cycle.
3. Identify and research issues facing an organization that require attention or that could lead to a crisis situation.
4. Identify important steps to deal with a crisis as it occurs.
5. Design a crisis communication response plan.
6. Present your plan and defend your decisions.

The Activity: Steps and Procedures

The students are first divided into groups of roughly equal numbers. The instructor should be the one to assign students to groups, making sure each group contains students of mixed-ability and is as diverse as possible. Each group is instructed to choose a company or organization that most group members are already perfunctorily familiar with, and pretend that they are the public relations department for that organization. As the PR department for their chosen company, each group is tasked with crisis response: they are to anticipate any issues that might turn into crises for their organization and be prepared to respond to crises that occur. Together, each group is to:

1. Choose an organization to "work" for and research that chosen company.
2. Analyze the company's current situation, based on the research collected. This involves writing a basic situation analysis, including an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).
3. Scan the environment of the company and industry to identify potential issues that could develop into crises for the organization.
4. Choose one of the issues identified, and envision how that issue could develop into a crisis that could plausibly impact the organization. This step involves designing and describing a particular crisis in detail.
5. Develop a specific crisis communication plan to respond to the designed crisis.
6. Present the research, designed crisis, and crisis response plan to the class.

With this activity, students are able to "produce new or original work," the pinnacle of Bloom's taxonomy, but it also requires them to work their way through each of the proceeding categories (Bloom, et al., 1956). In addition, the collaborative effort of the group work component contributes to the educational process. "The research on the effects of group learning has focused on several variables—achievement/productivity (learning), positive attitudes and ethics, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and psychological health—and group work enhances all of them for students at all educational levels and of all backgrounds" (Nilson, 2016, p. 180).

Assessment

Students are instructed that this project will result in a 5-10-page paper that should include the information described below, which also serves as the grading rubric for the paper. Each section of the paper corresponds to one of the stages in the crisis management lifecycle as presented in the assigned text (Wilcox et al., 2015). In addition, each group will also present their research, designed crisis and crisis response plan. The presentations should be 10 minutes, involve every member of the group, and include a visual aid. An additional 30-point value is added to the final paper grade for the presentation.

1. *Company information and background (10%):*

At a minimum, this section should answer: What is the company; what do they do; what services or products do they provide; how many employees and locations do they have? Have they ever faced any major crises? If so, what was their response or the result? This section should also include a SWOT analysis and any other background information deemed relevant.

2. *Environmental scan (Proactive Phase; 10%):*

Identify emerging trends, concerns, or issues—both within the organization, within the larger industry, or within society—likely to affect the organization in the next few years. Predict problems and anticipate threats to the company. This involves the reading, listening, and watching of current affairs with an eye to the organization's interests. Identify and describe at least five issues with the most potential to develop into crises for the organization. Why were those issues selected? What makes them the most likely to cause a crisis?

3. *Crisis (15%):*

Choose one of the issues identified in the environmental scan to develop into a full-blown crisis. Consider all possible factors about that crisis. Every detail about it is up to the group to design: What is it? Where did it start? Who does it involve? What level of blame could be accurately placed upon the company? How long does the crisis last? Does the media make the crisis public before the company is able to? etc.

4. *Crisis Response Plan (Strategic and Reactive Phases; 25%):*

Design the crisis management and communication plan for the crisis described in the previous section. At a minimum, this section should answer: What are the main messages? Who are the spokespeople and what employees will be made available for comment? What/where is the media headquarters? What main crisis response strategy and image restoration strategy should be employed (denial, excuse, justification, etc.)? Explain the reasoning behind every decision (why were those choices made regarding messages, strategy, spokespeople, etc.).

5. *Conclusion (Recovery Phase; 10%):*

What is the final result? What is the anticipated result if the company followed the crisis response plan exactly as designed? What next steps should be taken once the crisis is over?

Evidence of Student Learning

Working with a group to identify issues, create a crisis and respond to that crisis provides a cooperative learning experience, similar to the "think, share, pair" method that Nilson (2016) has found to be a particularly effective learning style. It also helps ensure that students have not simply learned the material in a way that allows them to just answer a question, but to reason with the material and fully apply it to real life scenarios. All of this is enabling the students to move through Bloom's Taxonomy in a demonstrable way.

In practice, I've found that students tend to split up the major sections of this paper and work independently on those sections. Most of the collaboration happens in the beginning, while choosing the company and the design of and response to the crisis, and at the end, in planning the presentation. Allowing some class time for work on this project allows me to monitor each individual's contribution to the project and the overall group dynamic, answer any major questions groups may encounter, and ensure each group completes the assignment correctly.

Linked below are examples of papers that were submitted during the spring 2021 semester, based on the assignment instructions. Please note that these examples have been linked in their originally-submitted form, without any comments or grading information, and are shared with student permission.

Student Example 1: Chick-fil-A

Student Example 2: American Eagle Outfitters

During the spring 2021 semester, I administered a volunteer survey to gauge reactions to this project. One-third of the students in this class participated in the research and answered questions about their experience with this project using a Likert-type scale. The questions and their responses are presented in table 1. While this represents an extremely small sample, it does provide some indication of students' perspectives of this project. Overall, during this semester, the students who responded enjoyed the project, did not find it too easy or overly difficult, self-reported gaining a better understanding of the material, and overwhelmingly understood the instructions and assignment expectations. Unsurprisingly, the group work aspect of the assignment drew mixed reviews.

An additional, open-ended question regarding the group dynamic was also included, which allowed students the opportunity to relay any serious concerns about their groups or particular individuals. I also regularly encourage students to inform me if there is major group discord or work disparity, so those issues can be assuaged before the project is due.

Table 1

Student Feedback

Question	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
How difficult was this assignment? (0=easy; 10=hardest project ever)	2	6	4.5	1.8
How much did you enjoy this assignment? (0=worst project ever; 10=most fun school assignment ever)	3	9	6.33	1.8
How much did this project help you better grasp the crisis management material? (0=no difference; 10=I understand so much better now.)	5	10	8	1.91
How clear were the instructions? (0=I had no idea what to do; 10=I knew exactly what to do.)	9	10	9.83	0.37
How clear were the expectations for this assignment? (0=I had no idea what I would be graded on; 10=I knew exactly what the final result would be.)	8	10	9.5	0.76
How was the group work aspect of this project? (0=I would have preferred to do this alone; 10=I loved my group!)	0	10	5.6	3.88

Conclusion

Crisis management abilities are necessary for success in public relations practice, and experiential learning techniques, such as the project described above, can help students thoroughly learn this important topic. By being introduced to this information early in their academic careers in a way that helps foster real learning through engagement and critical thinking, students can become proficient in this subject, leading to greater success in senior-level classrooms and, eventually, in the workforce.

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TEACHING BRIEF

Crisis and The Queen

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ABSTRACT

The in-class activity explores how Princess Diana's death turned into a crisis for the British monarchy. The movie, which is interspersed with actual footage, explores how the monarchy responded following the death of Princess Diana. After watching the film The Queen the class discusses aspects of the crisis, response strategies, and how it may have been handled differently today due to social media.

Keywords: film, social media, crisis communication

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Examining a real-world crisis through the lens of a film can help students better understand how to respond to real-life public relations crisis. This activity allows student to explore whether what took place was a crisis or paracrisis, the mistakes made, the response strategies used, and what they would have done if they were in the position of the Prime Minister or the Queen. Although some students may not have been aware of Princess Diana's life or death, they find the accident and what followed to be an interesting look into how a real-life crisis was handled.

The movie, which is set shortly after Diana's death, is a study in crisis communication and how to, and not to, address a crisis. Zaremba (2010) noted the film "illustrates how the newly elected Prime Minister, Tony Blair, attempted to defuse a developing crisis for the monarchy in Great Britain" (p. 113). Additionally, the inclusion of actual footage of mourners and the flowers outside Buckingham Palace can help to bridge the gap between what actually happened and Hollywood's version of events.

Shift in Response Time

While still time sensitive, prior to social media an organization had the benefit of a bit more time to craft a response to a crisis. Birch (1994) wrote, "The one thing that is in short supply during crisis is time" (p. 33). Additionally, Fishman (1999) stated, "The level and extent of media coverage directly influences the degree of 'urgency' placed upon an organization to provide a coherent explanation or to undertake corrective action" (p. 348). Tony Blair, prime minister of the United Kingdom at the time of Diana's death, gave a speech the morning she died where he historically called Diana "the people's princess." Queen Elizabeth did not make a public statement until five days after her death which caused some controversy among the people of the United Kingdom and a decline in her popularity (Kirby, 1998).

In today's 24/7/365 world, organizations are expected to respond within the hour of a crisis, if not before. Claeys and Opgenhaffen (2016) discuss the term “golden hour” which is “the first hour after the scandal breaks” (p. 239). This “golden hour” is important as the organization can get its side of the story out before the media. The faster an organization, or in this case a monarchy, can respond to a crisis, the better for its image and reputation (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016).

A crisis response must address the issue with as much transparency as possible, providing information to the key publics about what took place and how the organization will address it (Millar & Heath, 2004). Further, “strategic actions in response to a crisis can enhance an organization’s legitimacy” (Veil et al,, 2012, p. 333). Rather than waiting for the Queen to respond, Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at the time of Diana’s accident, took action through his press conference and decision to speak to the media. Eventually, through pressure, Queen Elizabeth did provide a response to her public via a televised statement.

Connection to Practice

Incorporating an actual crisis example through a film provides students an opportunity to apply what they have learned about crises and how to address them. The film is shown at the end of the semester so that students can point out and discuss the topics discussed throughout the semester from lecture, readings, guest speakers, and other in-class discussions.

The 2020 Global Communications Report (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2020) noted COVID-19 “taught us, future-focused PR executives must be prepared to manage unexpected events and controversial issues” (p. 12). As many crises a public relations practitioner may encounter in their career are unexpected, including Princess Diana’s death, this activity allows students to understand how to be better prepared to confront these issues should they arise.

One of the benefits of this exercise is first, the students are exposed to a piece of history (although it is a film which assumes some parts of what happened behind the scenes), and are able to identify the crisis aspects. Second, the exercise allows students to explore the various crisis response strategies used (which have been discussed in class prior to watching the film) and if, in their opinion, they did or did not work. Third, it provides an opportunity for students to explore what they would have done differently in the situation, as well as how modern technology, such as social media, may have changed the course of the discussion and the crisis response strategies employed by all parties involved.

Assignment and Implementation

Toward the end of the semester, students in an upper division public relations and crisis communication course would watch the film *The Queen*. By showing it at the end of the semester, which takes two class periods to watch, students can apply what they understand regarding what constitutes a crisis and the various crisis response strategies. Further, students witness a "crisis in action" without the stress of having to handle it themselves.

If teaching a crisis communication class, before watching the film, the professor should cover the following topics over the course of the semester:

- Definition of crisis
- Difference between a crisis and paracrisis
- Identifying the trigger event to a crisis
- Responding to the crisis
- Identifying the appropriate crisis response strategy(ies) to apply in a situation
- Identifying an organization's audience(s)
- Identifying and selecting a crisis management team and spokespeople
- Ethical communication prior to, during, and following a crisis

- Monitoring throughout the crisis
- Evaluating the situation post-crisis

Having discussed and read this information throughout the semester, students should be able to discuss how they believe the crisis addressed in the film was handled and what they would have done differently. Through written responses discussing the following questions, students can work out the best response strategy in their opinion and determine how they would go about implementing it if this were to have happened today. They are also able to demonstrate how, if at all, they understand the concepts which have been discussed throughout the semester in this application exercise. Students would need a minimum of one day to work on this assignment before submitting it to the professor for grading. It should be submitted prior to the next class meeting day following the viewing of the film to facilitate the debrief in-class discussion. The professor can then elaborate on the responses provided, which enables a more in-depth class discussion around the crisis itself and recommendations they have for crisis messaging during and after the event.

As students are watching the film, encourage them to take notes on the crisis elements they witness throughout. Once the film ends, on the second day, provide students the following discussion questions and ask them to submit their responses to them thoroughly, demonstrating their comprehension and understanding of crises and the content of the film:

- Is this a crisis or a paracrisis? How did you determine this?
- What was the trigger event for the crisis?
- Could the crisis have been prevented?
- What should have been done to prepare for this type of crisis (the death of a royal/non-royal)?
- What crisis response strategies did you notice?
- What did Blair and his team do well? Need to improve on?

- If you were in Blair's role, what would you have done differently/the same?
- If you were the Queen, would you have waited so long to respond? Why/why not?
- Do you think the people of the UK believed Queen Elizabeth and her statement? Why/why not?
- Diana died in 1997 when social media did not exist; if this were to happen today how do you think this would have changed the management of the crisis and the response to it?
- How would you have responded to this event if you worked on the public relations team for the Prime Minister? For Queen Elizabeth? Explain your response.

Assessment

The key learning objectives for the written assignment are to: 1) Identify the trigger event for this crisis; 2) Identify the crisis response strategies implemented in the film; 3) Discuss what the various parties did well and needed improvement regarding the crisis response; 4) Discuss how social media may have changed the crisis response by the various parties involved.

The written assignment is evaluated by the student's ability to accomplish the following: 1) to demonstrate knowledge of the types of crisis response strategies; 2) to identify the crisis response strategies used; 3) to effectively discuss the crisis response strategies and what they would have done in the situation; and 4) to edit and proofread their response prior to submission. This assignment counts as 5% of the total grade in the course.

Conclusion

The author has observed that students seem to enjoy learning through watching and discussing this particular film. The author has also found this activity has helped students better identify the various crisis response strategies which have been discussed throughout the semester. Additionally, the students have been able to apply their public relations knowledge to this situation pulling not only from the crisis course, but from courses including social media, writing, and others. One challenge has been some students not effectively or completely answering the questions posed. One way to address this has been after grading the written assignment the professor uses the next class meeting to hold a debriefing to discuss the questions with the class. The debriefing also allows the professor to further discuss the crisis strategies and responses and lets students hear the perspectives of their classmates and continue the discussion. Finally, this debriefing permits those students who did not provide complete or effective answers to discuss their thoughts verbally.

Following the debriefing with the class, students remarked how they enjoyed the use of outside media to talk about and make clearer the topics which had been discussed in class. Others stated the group discussion allowed them to see other classmate's point of view and build off each other when determining the course of action during and following a crisis. One student stated it was their favorite assignment as they were able to learn how to deal with a crisis on such a large scale, and how an institution like the British monarchy could recover from such a crisis.

As technology continues to change and evolve, other questions could be added to the list of discussion questions provided such as questions related to international public relations. A variation of the assignment could be having students discuss the questions in groups in class to develop a response, then with the class as a whole. These discussions could count toward in-class participation points for those who participated in the conversation.

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TEACHING BRIEF

Building Portfolios, Connections and Confidence: How Professors Can Leverage Student Writing Collections to Support Students' Employment Opportunities

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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. It was submitted to JPRE August 31, 2021, and accepted for publication at that time. Published March 2022. *Presented at the Public Relations Division of AEJMC as part of the GIFTs panel, August 2021.*

Rationale

At Drake University, Public Relations Writing is the second course required of all PR majors in a six-course sequence, and it provides an opportunity for students to develop the writing and editing skills necessary to succeed in a public relations career. Students learn to think critically about current events and how they relate to PR practice. Some coursework is completed on behalf of a community partner while much more is created on behalf of a dream employer of their choice. This allows students to customize their writing portfolios, while often feeling increased commitment to creating quality content. The best part? Each student's final work is shared by their professor with their dream employer, providing an important professional connection that often leads to job shadows, internships and even future employment.

Student Learning Goals

Aligning with the college's core values, this assignment is designed to help students "understand how to develop content across multiple channels in this age of media convergence, with sensitivity to multicultural audiences and an appreciation for global perspectives," and "apply reasoning, critical thinking, persuasion and creativity through the writing and editing processes." At the beginning of the semester, students take a pre-assessment to measure their self-identified comfort level with key facets of public relations. Throughout the semester, they peer edit one another's work prior to each submission, and the instructor provides detailed feedback on every assignment during the grading process. Students are encouraged to incorporate edits into each piece as the semester unfolds, so they can learn from the feedback while also refining their work. In the final week of the class, students select their top pieces from the class to feature in their portfolios. Students also take a post-assessment to identify areas of growth since the beginning of the semester.

Connections to Public Relations Practice and/or Theory

Students create a variety of materials in the class, including issues briefs, annual report content, fact sheets, infographics, fundraising appeal letters, digital and social strategy, proposals for corporate expansion, PSAs, brochures, blogs or podcasts and traditional press releases. Each student must also create an original piece to add to the collection, in addition to a cover letter and resume prepared for their dream employer. This final portfolio – five professional pieces and their cover letter and resume – qualifies as their final exam in the course. Immediately after finals, the professor sends the portfolios to the dream employers. As part of their portfolio development, students are responsible for identifying a contact name, email, and physical address of their dream employer. Typically, the contact is the public relations principal at the organization, or someone within the department that is responsible for the work the student wants to do. The professor uses this information to send the portfolio file with the explanatory email.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes/Assessment

In addition to evaluating the quality of student work, the external review of student portfolios often results in valuable feedback and ideas for future class assignments. Students' self-reported confidence grows according to the class pre- and post-test assessments. Portfolio deliveries have sparked job shadow opportunities with companies as varied as the Los Angeles Angels, American Airlines, National Geographic and Nationwide Insurance. Students' customized work has earned them internship positions in companies, government agencies and nonprofit organizations which have led to several full-time placements after graduation. A sample dream employer response is below, highlighting another important outcome—elevating the visibility of our small program.

Jenna –

Elise Eberwein shared your communications portfolio with me, and I am so glad she did. Terrific job putting together a wide variety of communications platforms, each with their own tone of voice. That's something we try to do at American Airlines every day. We have millions of customers and more than 100,000 employees who all have a different perspective on how our business works, and each one of them expects us to speak with them in familiar terms and with a friendly voice.

We're only a few months into our integration with US Airways, and it's very clear that the world is watching everything we say and do. Communication is critical. Much like your portfolio, we have to use a variety of channels to hit each audience and make sure that the message is consistent across all of them. You've done a nice job pointing to the restoration of our fleet and our commitment to being the greatest airline in the world with top-notch customer service.

Please keep us up to date on your projects and where your degree might take you next, and let us know if we can help in any way.

Casey Norton
Director, Corporate Communications
American Airlines
Office: 817-931-3051

APPENDIX A

The Assignment:
Final Individual "Dream Employer" Portfolio

Instructions

In lieu of a final exam, you will compile an individual "dream employer" portfolio. Please read the instructions and be sure to include all portfolio components.

- The "dream employer" portfolio must include at least five individually prepared tactics, four of which may be revisions of work you submitted on behalf of your dream employer throughout the semester. That means at least one tactic will be original for your portfolio.
- The original tactic can be anything we have discussed this semester that you haven't prepared for your dream employer (e.g. fact sheet, social media content calendar and posts, blog/podcast concept, PSA, VNR, etc.) or other tactic of your choosing. However, the tactic should be appropriate for your dream employer and its public(s).
- Additionally, your individual portfolio must include a cover letter and current resume. The cover letter for your dream employer should be addressed to an appropriate public relations contact within the organization. The letter should express your interest in working for the organization, and pitch the work contained within your portfolio. You must include the full name, title and mailing address of the PR contact on the letter, as I will mail these packets to those contacts.

Formatting

- The individual portfolio should include your cover letter and resume followed by your tactics as a single Word .docx or pdf.

- All tactics should be thoughtfully created, well organized, properly formatted and of professional quality, reflecting your best work. Use proper grammar, spelling, punctuation and AP Style. Attribute outside sources, as appropriate.

Evaluation

- Your individual "dream employer" portfolio will be worth 200 points. Standard evaluation criteria will apply.
- Failing to submit your portfolio by deadline will result in a zero for the final exam grade.
- While we encourage this outreach to future employers as a unique opportunity to showcase your abilities, you may request that your portfolio not be submitted to your dream employer. Please share any concerns with me. Note: Your project will still be due by the final exam deadline and evaluated as your final exam grade in the course.

APPENDIX B
TABLE 1: RUBRIC

PR Writing – Dream Employer Portfolio/Final Exam Rubric

In addition to the items noted in the rubric, accuracy will be evaluated throughout the portfolio. The writing should be based on facts that can be verified by a third party. Grammar, spelling, punctuation and AP Style should be used correctly. No spelling errors! In fact, one error will bring a deduction of 7 points to your final grade. Two errors will bring a deduction of 14 points, and more than three errors will result in 20 points automatically lost.

	Weak	Average	Strong
Reasoning	**20 points** The purpose of the writing – what the intended public is supposed to think or do – is not clear or supported by sufficient evidence.	**26.66667 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**33.33333 points** The purpose of the writing – what the reader is supposed to think or do – is clear and supported by sufficient evidence.
Critical Thinking	**20 points** The writing is basic and shows little to no understanding of targeted public(s) or consideration for possible counter arguments.	**26.66667 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**33.33333 points** The writing demonstrates thorough understanding of targeted public(s) and anticipates and addresses possible counter arguments.
Persuasion	**16 points** The writing does not motivate readers to think, feel or do.	**21.33333 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**26.66667 points** The writing motivates readers to think, feel or do.
Creativity	**16 points** The writing is bland, without persuasive or style components.	**21.33333 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**26.66667 points** The writing employs an unexpected approach without compromising any of the other principles.

Strong Ethics	**16 points** The writing engages in ambiguity, exaggeration or misleading language.	**21.33333 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**26.66667 points** The writing stays within ethical parameters; there is no ambiguity, exaggeration, or misleading language.
Solid Voice	**16 points** The writer uses passive voice, with inappropriate style and tone.	**21.33333 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**26.66667 points** The writer uses active voice. The style and tone are appropriate for the target public and the medium.
Aesthetics	**16 points** Overall design, layout, style and appearance are not appropriate for the organization, target public(s) and medium.	**21.33333 points** Some objectives of the assignment are met but not completely or to complete expectations.	**26.66667 points** Overall design, layout, style and appearance are appropriate for the organization, target public(s) and medium.

APPENDIX C

Sample Cover Letter From Professor to Dream Employer:

[Director of Communication (or similar title)]
[Organization Name]
[Organization address]
[Organization CSZ]

[Date]

[Salutation]:

Greetings from <UNIVERSITY NAME> in <CITY, STATE>! I'm proud to share the attached portfolio of student work with you, with this letter serving as explanation and context.

As part of <UNIVERSITY NAME'S> globally distinguished Public Relations program, students take a variety of courses that all include a "real-world" component to help prepare them for professional practice. As early as their sophomore years, students are producing work for real organizations.

For our required Public Relations Writing course, students are able to choose a "dream employer" for which to create a variety of work. Throughout the semester, they create an issues brief, a news release, social media posts, and more, all for their self-identified dream employer. That's where you come in.

One of my students has chosen your organization as their dream employer, and has created the enclosed materials with your goals in mind. While these materials are, of course, never distributed on your behalf, I thought you would appreciate seeing how passionate this student is about the important work you do.

We send these to you as a way to know the impact your organization has on students here in <CITY, STATE>, and as a way to show off our quality student work. If you're interested in learning more about <UNIVERSITY'S> PR program, please feel free to reach out to me. If you're interested in contacting the student about internship opportunities or for more information, you'll find their contact information in the attached materials.

As you know, in today's rapidly changing media environment, it's more important than ever that students have a solid foundation of applied practice before entering the workforce. That's our goal with this course, and with all of <UNIVERSITY'S> Public Relations coursework. Thank you for providing inspiration to our students!

Best,

<PROFESSOR NAME>
<PROFESSOR TITLE>
<UNIVERSITY>
<PROFESSOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION>

APPENDIX D
TABLE 2: PRE-ASSESSMENT

PR Writing Pre-Assessment: Students complete this questionnaire during the first class meeting.

JMC 123: PR Writing Pre-assessment

1. For each item listed below, indicate how familiar you are with that particular facet of public relations practice:

Facet of PR Practice	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Neutral	Somewhat unfamiliar	Very unfamiliar
Research/planning					
Internal communications					
News media relations					
Social media relations					
Community relations					
Government relations					
Investor relations					
Consumer relations					
Internal communications					
Advocacy					
Crisis Communication					
Integrated marketing communications					

2. For each item listed below, indicate how confident you would feel TODAY if you had to write content for that particular type of public relations tactic:

Type of PR Practice	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Neutral	Somewhat lacking in confidence	Not confident at all
Issues brief					
Message platform					
Newsletter					
Intranet					
Fact sheet					
Backgrounder					
Advisory					
Pitch					
News release					
Video news release					
Social media news release					
Blog					
Micro-blog (e.g., Twitter)					
Live tweeting					
Podcast					
Presentation					

Type of PR Practice	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Neutral	Somewhat lacking in confidence	Not confident at all
Grant proposal					
Policy brief					
Annual report					
Earning statement					
Brochure					
Magazine					
Website					
Mobile application					
Market assessment					
Public service announcement					
Crisis plan					
Webinar					
Writing portfolio					

3. For each item listed below, indicate how you would rate your current skill level for that particular aspect of public relations writing:

Aspect of PR writing	Very strong	Somewhat strong	Average	Somewhat weak	Very weak
Reasoning (i.e. creating and defending a central argument)					
Critical thinking (i.e. anticipating and proactively addressing counter-arguments)					
Persuasion					
Creativity					
Spelling					
Grammar					
AP Style					

4. What, if anything, about starting this course causes you the MOST anxiety?

Thank you for your time and input. The feedback will help guide our work this semester.

APPENDIX E

TABLE 3: POST-ASSESSMENT

PR Writing Sample Post-Assessment: A student's responses captured in the last class period of a recent term. (Shared with student's permission)

JMC 123: PR Writing
Pre-assessment

5. For each item listed below, indicate how familiar you are with that particular facet of public relations practice:

Facet of PR Practice	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Neutral	Somewhat unfamiliar	Very unfamiliar
Research/planning		X			
Internal communications		X			
News media relations	X				
Social media relations	X				
Community relations		X			
Government relations		X			
Investor relations		X			
Consumer relations	X				
Internal communications	X				
Advocacy		X			
Crisis Communication	X				
Integrated marketing communications		X			

6. For each item listed below, indicate how confident you would feel TODAY if you had to write content for that particular type of public relations tactic:

Type of PR Practice	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Neutral	Somewhat lacking in confidence	Not confident at all
Issues brief		X			
Message platform		X			
Newsletter	X				
Intranet		X			
Fact sheet	X				
Backgrounder	X				
Advisory		X			
Pitch	X				
News release	X				
Video news release	X				
Social media news release	X				
Blog	X				
Micro-blog (e.g., Twitter)	X				
Live tweeting	X				
Podcast		X			
Presentation	X				

Type of PR Practice	**Very confident**	**Somewhat confident**	**Neutral**	**Somewhat lacking in confidence**	**Not confident at all**
Grant proposal	**X**				
Policy brief		**X**			
Annual report		**X**			
Earning statement		**X**			
Brochure	**X**				
Magazine	**X**				
Website	**X**				
Mobile application	**X**				
Market assessment	**X**				
Public service announcement	**X**				
Crisis plan	**X**				
Webinar		**X**			
Writing portfolio	**X**				

7. For each item listed below, indicate how you would rate your current skill level for that particular aspect of public relations writing:

Aspect of PR writing	Very strong	Somewhat strong	Average	Somewhat weak	Very weak
Reasoning (i.e. creating and defending a central argument)	**X**				
Critical thinking (i.e. anticipating and pro-actively addressing counter-arguments)	**X**				
Persuasion	**X**				
Creativity	**X**				
Spelling			**X**		
Grammar			**X**		
AP Style		**X**			

8. What, if anything, about this course caused you the MOST anxiety?
As I move on from this class, I hope to remember the great majority of what I learned. I hope that my grammar and spelling can continue to improve as well as my content and creativity. I want this class to be a solid foundation for what is to come in my future and career when it comes to writing. I hope to be an effective communicator orally and more importantly through writing.

Thank you for your time and input. The feedback will help to shape our PR curriculum.

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BOOK REVIEW

Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer Resources

Reviewed by
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Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer Resources
Authors: Matthew W. Ragas and Ron Culp
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In *"Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer,"* Matt Ragas and Ron Culp add an incredibly valuable contribution to their already extensive work designed to help strategic communication students and professionals expand their understanding of business terminology and practices. In this most recent offering, Ragas and Culp expand upon their first book, *"Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators: Creating Shared Value for the Organizations and its Stakeholders"* (2014) and *"Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators: Insights and Advice from the C-Suite of Leading Brands"* (2018) that offered sage advice from leading strategic communication industry professionals. In her review of the *"Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators,"* Swann (2019) notes that, "where their first book gave students a solid business foundation, this book takes the reader into the mind of the senior communication professional" (p. 145).

"Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer" offers a strong update of much of the materials in Business Essentials. As noted in the preface to *Business Acumen*, public relations professionals and educators have long called for the field to have a place at the decision-making level of an organization. One factor holding back public relations and other strategic communicators is their lack of understanding of, and ability to converse with, basic business terminology.

The need for strategic communication students to understand business practices better is a common theme in public relations literature. Cannon and Waymer (2016) referenced research by Ragas et al. (2015) noting that senior public relations executives "believed public relations educators should put greater emphasis on business thinking in public relations classes" (Cannon & Waymer, p. 106).

In May of 2015, 50 leading practitioners and educators in the field of public relations were brought together in an effort to develop a consensus on the knowledge, skills and attributes (KSAs) that are important for entry-level public relations employees. While many of the nine knowledge areas identified by the group can be tied to business acumen, two were specific about the need for training in business practices: "Business processes and planning. 'Business acumen,' described as understanding how business works, to provide the contextual significance of public relations" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2015, p. 8). Additionally, Brunner et al. (2018) note that both professionals and educators wish for greater business acumen among PR students and entry-level employees:

> DiStaso et al. (2009) found professionals and academics agreed that entry-level employees should have skills, both hard and soft, including

> good attitudes, initiative, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, organization skills, interpersonal skills, flexibility, knowledge of media, knowledge of current events, creativity, the ability to take criticism, and understanding of basic business practices. Again, the findings showed that entry-level employees are sorely lacking in all the above skills, but they were rated especially low for knowledge of current events and business practices. Similarly, Auger and Cho (2016) found public relations programs are still lacking in requirements for business courses in the curriculum. These findings suggest that educators need to place greater emphasis on these areas and types of knowledge. (Brunner, et al., 2018, p. 24)

Commission on Public Relations Education reports, for example, the 2006 "Professional Bond" report and the 2017 report (DiStaso, 2019), also emphasized the need for greater instruction in the basics of business practice. Clearly there is strong evidence of consistent and long-term calls for an increase in business acumen in public relations students and practitioners.

Content Structure and Organization

The text is divided into six sections that help the reader to organize the information and make it easier to access the information later. Part I provides an introduction to the topic and text. The single chapter in the section defines business acumen and explains the importance and role of business acumen within the field of strategic communication.

Parts II and III outline three guiding approaches to business (II) and people (III) critical to business practice: stakeholders, the board of directors and the c-suite. Part IV includes three chapters that focus on the financial (money and the numbers) relations in business. The three chapters of part

IV are particularly useful, as they outline both basic, general information (e.g., how the stock market works) and specific practices in financial relations (e.g., how to read an income statement). Part V discusses the practice of strategic communication in agencies/consultancies and how it is practiced in in-house communication departments. The two chapters in part V would be excellent supplements even for material in an introductory public relations course. The final part (chapter 12) offers insight into how individuals can enhance their business acumen and explains how an understanding of business can enrich a professional career.

Each chapter offers several pedagogical elements that instructors may find useful. The list of key terms in the chapter provides a quick study sheet for students and the discussion questions can be used for many purposes, including for classroom discussion, report/paper topics, or exam questions. The final pedagogical element is a sidebar piece authored by a strategic communication professional who discusses topics related to the chapter. Ragas and Culp are to be congratulated for selecting sidebar authors who represent the entire spectrum of strategic communication professionals.

Following the final chapter of the text, the authors offer several sections that make this book a particularly useful addition to a professional's reference materials. The glossary is over 40 pages in length and offers definitions and explanations for hundreds of terms, ranging from accelerator to zero-based-budgeting. The references section offers readers a quick reference to works related to the various topics discussed, and the additional information on the sidebar contributors helps the reader to understand the contributor's perspective.

Contribution to Public Relations Education

"Business Acumen" is written as a supplementary text and can be paired

with a wide variety of topics in the public relations curriculum. The most obvious use is as a supplement to courses in public relations management, case studies and/or campaigns, but it should be considered as a supplement to all courses in the curriculum. Because of the broad application possibilities for this work, programs may consider requiring the book for all public relations students, allowing individual course instructors to require all or a portion of the book for a specific course.

Individual chapters can supplement the discussion of topics that are found in multiple classes. For example, chapter 5, “Stakeholders and Society” would be a wonderful addition to discussions of stakeholder relations, CSR initiatives, social advocacy, and DEI programs. The final chapter of the text discusses the role of business acumen in professional development and offers ten ways for students to build their business acumen, before and after graduation.

Ragas and Culp have written the material in this text so that it is easily understood by those with little or no understanding of investor relations and/or business practices. While the writing is accessible to all, practitioners will find the breadth of the material helpful to build on their current knowledge.

Conclusion

This review began with a brief examination of calls for greater business education in the public relations curriculum. “Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators: A Primer” by Matthew Ragas and Ron Culp is the answer to those calls. After reviewing the information in this book, public relations students should have an easier time passing a business and finance knowledge quiz (Vahouny, 2021), have an easier time successfully transitioning into the field, and find success in their professional practice.

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BOOK REVIEW

Public Relations History: Theory, Practice, and Profession

Reviewed by
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Public Relations History: Theory, Practice, and Profession
Author: Cayce Myers
Routlege, 2021
ISBN: 978-1-138-49140-3 (hbk)
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ISBN: 978-1-351-03301-5 (ebk)

As is common practice, before sitting down with Myer's (2021) historical text on the development of modern public relations, I considered his stated goal for the work:

> In this book I set out to provide an overview of where public relations history is today, and, to a greater extent, provide a historiography of public relations While this book attempts to do all of that, it also serves as an overview of the origins of public relations as an action and as a practice (p. x).

Myers also adds a comment all too familiar to many public relations practitioners, scholars, and educators alike, "In doing this, I found that public relations history, like the history of any profession and practice, is multi-layered and not nearly as compartmentalized as I had previously thought" (p. x). In this sentence, Myers sets the tone for a complex, comprehensive history of our field's development and growth that is so rarely addressed in contemporary introductory texts, or effectively covered in undergraduate or graduate classrooms.

Structure and Organization

To understand what makes the work different, one needs only examine the organization of the work. Myers begins by considering the diverse spectrum of definitions of public relations that we have in our discipline, and the issues related to those definitions: (1) whether PR should be defined by practice or by the act of doing public relations work, (2) how public relations definitions of professional practice affect the narrative of PR history, and (3) the impact of individuals on the field, and how PR history coalesces around the personal narratives of the so-called great men and women of PR. Made clear in recent studies on the community building actions of pioneer women on the Oregon Trail (Pompper, 2020), and a rich history on the early corporate communication and public relations actions of AT&T seeking to maintain its monopoly during the first half of the twentieth century (Russell, 2020), public relations educators need to strive to provide a more nuanced perspective on the historical development and evolution of public relations. For too long, it has been married to the early efforts of P.T. Barnum, Ivy Lee, and Edward Bernays and firmly anchored in the continental United States. Myers advances this call in his approach to articulate key industry pioneers and contributors that have often been absent in our foundational texts on the field. The same conscious, thoughtful consideration applies in reading his discussion of various definitions and their impact on our historical interpretation of the field.

Myers then walks the reader through the historical development of public relations theory, breaking down the four models as dominant forms of practice in different eras of the twentieth century (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). What sets his work apart in this process is how he moves from a thorough discussion of the historical eras to a consideration of some essential critiques that help the reader properly contextualize the strengths and weaknesses of the four models, setting up the call for a critical consideration that improves our historical understanding of the discipline as we move through the 21st century.

Moving beyond the definitional and theoretical aspects of public relations, the rest of the text is organized into 10 easily digested chapters that cover the practice of public relations in key niche areas of practice. Included in the volume are political public relations (Chapter 3), propaganda, public relations, and public opinion (Chapter 4), public relations, propaganda, and conflict (Chapter 5), public relations in non-profits, education, and religion (Chapter 6), corporate public relations (Chapter 7), entertainment and the creation of the PR professional (Chapter 8), public relations ethics, organizations, and credentialing (Chapter 9), and the future of the history of public relations (Chapter 10).

As the list of specific areas of practice indicates, Myers is committed to presenting a more thorough understanding of the discipline. For example, he is to be commended for taking on a more holistic exploration of propaganda, its rise and application in a variety of contexts, and how it has informed the practice and perception of public relations as a modern discipline. Further, while we have seen references to the entertainment industry as fundamental to the emergence of the public relations professional, Myers offers a much deeper consideration of press agentry and publicism as professions in the era and how the culture of the period informed the early development of public relations professionals.

This deeper examination of public relations foundations sets up a thorough examination of the cultural influences and larger philosophical matters related to the practice of public relations in the text in the final chapters.

An invaluable discussion is his consideration of how corporate public relations, the rise of government regulation in post-World War I America, and the law all played a critical role in how public relations cultivated various codes of ethics, professional organizations, and its modern systems for professional and academic accreditation. Myers closes the piece with a renewed call for historians in public relations to ensure they avoid narrow considerations of the historical origins and development of public relations, and instead develop a critical, thorough understanding of public relations development and relationship to other fields and industries that have shaped its practice.

Contribution to Public Relations Education

The text offers educators and scholars alike a reconceptualization of our discipline that can enhance the study of public relations history moving forward. Readers should note the text is one that can be easily accessible to educators, scholars, and industry professionals interested in learning more about the discipline and setting a foundational understanding of the state or historical research in public relations. Pedagogically, this book is an invaluable tool for those preparing to teach the introductory public relations course, and a useful set of readings for a graduate level course in public relations foundations.

In summary, Myers offers the discipline an invaluable tool that will help aspiring professionals, educators, and scholars develop a firm grasp on the development of our discipline, and how we need to consider its study as we look for new areas of historical analysis. Educators should see this as a resource to make the history chapter and discussion a richer experience for their students, and those working on introductory texts should read Myers and use it to inform their approach to discussing the foundation of our field. Current and past students of the discipline should appreciate the volume for offering a complex, multi-layered consideration of public relations that is by no means as compartmentalized as Myers himself had initially assumed.

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BOOK REVIEW

Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect (4th Ed.)

Reviewed by
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Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect (4th Ed.)
Author: Regina (Gina) Luttrell, Ph.D.
Rowman & Littlefield
Pages: 264
ISBN-13: 978-1442226111
ISBN-10: 1442226110
https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538154410/Social-Media-How-to-Engage-Share-and-Connect-Fourth-Edition

For those seeking a career in public relations and social media, *Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect*, by Regina Luttrell, makes the transition from classroom to boardroom, for students and instructors mentoring them, complete and somehow painless. The fourth edition is updated to reflect innovations, challenges, tools, and issues specific to today's digital landscape for public relations practitioners.

Structure and Organization

Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect is organized into three parts: 1) The Advancement of an Industry, 2) Strategic Planning: Public Relations and Social Media, and 3) Strategic Management: Public Relations and Social Media. These parts work to engage readers in 14 chapters ranging from theory to practice, ethics, and the future in a comprehensive manner to unearth the "why" behind social media strategy and not just all the "fun" things you can tactically imagine. The "why" or use of strategy is one of the key differentiators of this text in a crowded market of social media textbooks. As an educator and professional, I want students to understand why they are doing something in an effort to remain strategic, comfortable, platform agnostic and skillfully dangerous, in an ever-changing environment where social media platforms come and go–good-bye Facebook, hello Meta.

As a core text, this book is suitable for subjects or classes related to language arts, communication studies, advertising, public relations, business communications, marketing, social sciences, media studies, digital studies, political science (digital activism), and more. The work would also be an excellent partner to a main text if you would like to inject more social media into an introduction to public relations, digital media, social media, public relations or advertising campaigns class, or even a communication, marketing, advertising, or public relations capstone or internship course.

Changes to Fourth Edition

This seminal text on social media is a public relations educator staple. This book is one of the few social media textbooks updated regularly, which eliminates the normal weakness of a social media text which is that as soon as it is published, it is outdated. Author Luttrell and publishers, Rowman & Littlefield, solved that issue for instructors with their proactive updates

Features of the fourth edition include improved chapter objectives and learning outcomes, which easily align with a semester schedule; social media expert profiles and practice areas to help satisfy the "what do you do in a day" question popular among applied major program students; theory- into-practice boxes with exercises that connect back to the chapter material or updated case studies using the "diversity-first" approach–a staple in Luttrell's books; a living Twitter community and boxes throughout the text that address "learn social media and public relations" with #LRNSMPR where students can connect with others even countries apart; a more comprehensive glossary of terminology for students and faculty to examine together; a discussion of additional social media channels (Clubhouse and TikTok); and finally, a new appendix with ideas for social media strategy guidelines and templates that allow practice in the classroom (p. 219-239).

I particularly like the digital assets in this edition which allow me to make practice handouts for quick and dirty in-class social media audits. The author uses resources from several case studies and infographics, including downloadable models on her website at www.ginaluttrellphd.com. Additional materials can be requested through Rowman & Littlefield publishing with an educator login.

Contributions to Public Relations Education

As in previous editions, this edition illustrates the author's concern for both the history and future of social media as it applies to public relations and the business case for sound strategy supported by creative tactics. The textbook bridges social media theory and practice, which by nature includes both understanding of the medium and how to "do" social media. Strategic council occurs thoughtfully and deliberately through her signature "practitioner speaks" approach included in all of her textbooks. Additionally, the book is accessible for students, professionals, and educators who might need help keeping up on the barrage of new tools, strategies, and techniques within the social sphere. Keeping up with social media trends and policy can be arduous; however, this book mitigates that work for fellow educators.

Of particular note are the modifications to Chapter 4, The Road Map to Success: Developing a Social Media Plan, which carries throughout the text. Luttrell introduces readers to the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for PR Practitioners and explains how the "diversity-first" approach is central to social media and public relations planning (Luttrell, 2020). This addition, partnered with the chapter on social media ethics (Chapter 11), unifies the deliberate thought around inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility principles in practice throughout the public relations curriculum, something often missing from other popular social media texts. The addition is a core differentiator of this textbook for use in the public relations classroom.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strength: Cost

Rowman & Littlefield get it: book price shouldn't be a barrier to education for students or for instructors. For some, the price point of this book won't prove to be a barrier to adoption, given the $35 cost for paperback.

Strength: Language

Luttrell is skilled at using plain language in most of her textbooks. The author understands the needs of students and strives for a favorable student experience through easy information which is neither oversimplified nor stilted. She writes in a way that is easy to read and understand, making classroom participation less of a barrier. I frequently heard students comment that they often read ahead because their interest was genuinely piqued. The text takes a complicated series of topics and makes them immediately executable to a generation that thinks they may already “know” social media. A “digital native” doesn’t equal digital expert, so this textbook improves perspectives among young professionals and makes barriers to entry in a technical field less panic-inducing.

Strength: Application

If you have ever purchased a textbook written by Luttrell, you’ll know much of her strength lies in demonstrating practical application of theory. In this she creates a landing place for students to examine the fuzzy bits and really extrapolate perspective in order to activate or repair strategy. In this particular edition, her theory-into-practice boxes and the social media expert profiles elevate that form.

Neutral: Influencers

The topic of influencers is more a neutral point than a weakness for this text. That said, as influencers faced a reckoning in the last year in a COVID-19 environment with trust and ethics routinely violated, I’d like to see the fifth edition improve coverage in the area of influencer relations. Sourcing Amanda Russell’s book, *The Influencer Code: How to Unlock the Power of Influencer Marketing* (2021), which has quickly established itself as the ‘‘influencer Bible’’ within the last year, along with Northwestern University Kellogg School’s (2021) adoption of the “Influencer U’’ curriculum for its Executive Management program would help. Doing so would be a perfect partnership, collaboration, or extension of the textbook.

Weakness: Text Presentation

At no fault to the author–this is more a deficiency of the publisher – I feel compelled to address text presentation as a weakness. We NEED color in our textbooks. You can’t expect a student who is glued to a LED or OLED smartphone to engage fully with a text on social media when the photo examples of charts, graphs, and examples of social media (i.e., Instagram feed, tweets, Facebook [Meta] posts, etc,) are printed in the text in black and white.

Summary

Dr. Luttrell is a prolific, trusted, and well-respected author in the area of social media and offers an unparalleled framework for understanding and practical use of social media in a public relations context. I've adopted every edition of Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect as both a partner text in introduction public relations courses, and in an introduction to advertising and public relations course at my institution. I have no qualms in encouraging others to do the same.

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