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From the Editor:

I hope this issue of The Journal is as relevant to you as it has been to me. While I've connected to every issue, perhaps our first in-person meeting of AEJMC's Public Relations Division in a couple of years enhanced the relevance. The PRD included a pre-conference special session on ASPIRE – Active Strategies for Pedagogy in Research and Education, featuring the GIFTS, and the top five (presented in order of their rankings) are included here. While we could not feature all of the GIFTS, the authors presented so many great ideas that have inspired me.

To be honest, I've already adapted some of Deline's work included here. In doing so, I learned much about the student experiences during the pandemic response – including that most were freshmen having to complete core courses on line. I hope to continue to include a variation of the reflection on KSAs as the next group will be the one who missed much of the social side of completing high school.

In the area of pedagogical research, the first article on mentorship provides some feedback on the mentorship program of the PRD. Having signed up to serve as a mentor, I am internalizing the results, and thinking about how I can improve as a mentor. The second article is a good reminder that service learning, specifically fundraising in this case, can have an impact on learning on into the future.

I hope all of these papers and GIFTS are inspirational to you as well, and don't forget about the special issue focused on GIFTS for next year:
https://aejmc.us/jpre/2022/09/17/special-issue-call-for-papers-the-gift-exchange/

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Building Bridges and Relationships Through Balanced Communication: Understanding Psychosocial Factors in Positive Public Relations Mentorship

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring relationships are correlated with positive outcomes and career success in both industry and academia. Although public relations mentorship is not studied as broadly as other managerial disciplines, it is a large and growing field. Results of a study of an academic public relations mentorship program indicate that structural factors such as distance or frequency of contact are not as important to perceived positive outcomes as were psychosocial factors. Two surveys ($N = 25$ and $N = 33$, 62.5% and 53.97% response rate, respectively) revealed that trust emerged as a central factor for building positively perceived mentoring relationships. However, emphasis is placed on how to build trust through responsive communication. And building trust leads to more positive perceptions of mentoring relationships. Notably, mentors and mentees had significantly different perceptions of relationship outcomes, suggesting the need to further explore power differentials in mentoring relationships. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: mentorship, public relations education, skills, trust, mentor

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A significant body of research exists to explore best practices in and outcomes from mentoring relationships, but gaps persist in the literature (Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, 2016). For example, scholars have yet to concretely define the concept of mentoring, in part because mentoring can take multiple forms and consist of multiple activities. Further, the Plank Center's white paper on mentoring and best practices specifically points to the "lack of convincing empirical evidence that mentoring programs make a positive difference" (p. 17). Although it only breaks the surface of these issues, this study explores some of these issues through an analysis of a faculty-focused mentoring program housed in a major national communication association.

The Association for Education in Mass Communication and Journalism (AEJMC) Public Relations Division's (PRD) mentorship program began in 2014-2015 with 26 participants (13 pairs) and grew to 36 pairs and 72 active participants by 2019-2020. Annually, PRD members are recruited via the PRD listerv, newsletter, and social media platforms. Program participants complete an online application form and membership committee leaders pair them based on responses regarding mentorship needs (e.g., primary research area interests, job market preparation), demographics (e.g., age, gender, academic status) and interpersonal factors and preferences (e.g., scholar with professional background, female scholar only).

Mentorship pairs are announced via email introductions prior to AEJMC and all are invited to attend an hour-long meet and greet held at the conference. For those able to attend, the "mentorship coffee break" provides a formal face-to-face meeting opportunity for the mentoring pairs to make initial contact before moving into a distance relationship.

During the first five years of the program, PRD leadership followed its progress anecdotally through membership committee feedback (received directly from participants) and surveys. However, long-term membership committee members noted trends that might provide opportunities for improvement and to share best practices for mentorship with other programs and academic mentors in general.

Mentorship in higher education has long been studied as a pathway to success for junior faculty and doctoral students transitioning into academic positions. Formal mentorship has emerged as a determinant of positive career outcomes (van der Weijden et al., 2015), especially in regard to teaching (Pierce & Martinez, 2012). Contributing factors such as gender, race, the added responsibility of dependents, and the structure of the mentorship relationship (such as co-learning and peer-to-peer mentoring) have been investigated in various academic fields (Ogan & Robinson, 2008; Sarikakis, 2003; Totleben & Deiss, 2015), but few studies have examined mentorship in public relations education to identify best practices or the structure of successful and positive relationships.

To fill this gap, this study examines participant perceptions of relationships formed through the AEJMC PRD Mentorship Program. Two surveys distributed during a five-year period (2015-2020) were used to explore how structural and psychosocial factors such as frequency of contact, responsivity, length of relationship, and trust correlated with positive perceptions of relationships and their outcomes. Additionally, as this program pairs mentoring partners between institutions, distance was considered a factor impacting relationship outcomes. In practice, survey results were used to understand the overall attitudes of program participants and identify any factors that should be addressed or changed in the program's structure to improve both outcomes and participant experiences. Results indicate that psychosocial factors related to relationship building are key to positive mentoring relationships. Further, practical outcomes highlight the need for responsive communication between mentoring partners and the importance of understanding differing perceptions among mentors and mentees.

Literature Review

To better understand best practices and quality in mentoring relationships, this section outlines existing literature on mentoring, mentoring relationships in public relations, and the psychosocial and structural factors that contribute to or inhibit success in these important relationships.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is considered important for developing skills, gaining psychosocial and socioemotional support, supporting career advancement, and ultimately, encouraging success (Haggard et al., 2001; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Packard, 2016). The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations' (2017) recent report on mentoring describes mentorship as "when a mentor, or someone with experience in a certain field, creates a bond or relationship with a mentee, an individual who is looking to grow [their] expertise in that field" (p. 2). To note, it is important to distinguish mentoring from advising, which typically emphasizes sharing information about the activities needed to complete an educational program or pursue a career path (Montgomery et al., 2014). Mentoring may include aspects of advising but extends that type of support due to its personal nature and deep engagement (Montgomery, 2017; Montgomery et al., 2014). While mentoring is a term often used in conversation, there is no universally accepted definition of mentoring (Miller 2002; Zimmerman & Paul, 2007), and the term is difficult to define consistently (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). Some define mentoring as a process (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Baker, 2015; Baker et al., 2013; Roberts, 2000), while others define it as a series of activities, an intense relationship between a more experienced and less experienced person, or simply powerful informal communication that leads to career or personal advancement (Allen et al., 2004; Bahniuk & Hill, 1998).

One commonality across definitions of mentoring is the emphasis on one-way, top-down communication (Montgomery, 2017). However, both early career professionals and those in senior positions seek mentoring; and in practice, the benefits of mentoring are often reciprocal (Zachary & Fischler, 2009). Because mentoring is mutually beneficial to both mentors and mentees (see Jones & Brown, 2011; Mullen & Kennedy, 2007; Tong & Kram, 2013), a more holistic definition of mentoring is as a relationship in which one participant shares their expertise and time to help another participant further develop and master skills and knowledge (Kram, 1985).

Ideally, mentoring relationships include a joint sense of caring, sharing, and helping between the mentoring pair. These distinctions allow for mentorship to be viewed as more than a one-way, top-down relationship. To note, because of the strong connections between the Plank Center and the PRD Mentoring Program, program leaders have generally embraced Plank Center research (2016) and values (2017) when developing and maintaining the program and sharing insights into mentoring best practices. These values are routinely communicated at the annual breakfast and in participant-facing communication that happens throughout the year, both to provide context for the values guiding the program and to encourage best practices while mentoring pairs build and maintain their relationships.

Mentors, Protégés, and Mentoring Relationships

In simple terms, a mentor can be described as a more experienced person, while the protégé or mentee has less experience and may be in a junior position (Eby & Allen, 2002). A mentor is someone who teaches, supports, counsels, protects, promotes, and sponsors another person in their career and personal development (Zey, 1984). Scholars have expanded this definition to note that mentors are role models and someone a protégé can seek when they do not know how to work through an issue independently (Noe, 1988; Wilson & Elman, 1990). Although mentors are often identified and selected based on demographic or structural qualities, research suggests that selecting mentors based on psychosocial qualities can lead to more meaningful outcomes (Allen et al., 2004; Kram, 1985).

For example, while several scholars note that mentors can attend to both career and personal development, some have found that male mentors are more likely to provide career guidance and female mentors are more likely to also attend to psychosocial needs of protégés (Allen et al., 2004). However, such gender-based differences in mentoring may contribute to the continuation of gendered social roles (Pompper & Adams, 2006). For example, public relations is a predominantly female field, but males are more often in leadership positions (Arenstein, 2019). This situation creates a competitive dynamic between males and females, including among females vying for roles to advance their careers. As females are expected to be naturally more nurturing than males, assumptions of female excellence as mentors is often assumed. Unfortunately, this occurrence is not always the case in competitive work environments. Although females report that emotional support is indeed a benefit of same-sex dyads, conflict is also reported due to the competition for advancement (Pompper & Adams, 2006). Arguably, this example highlights the value of seeking mentors based on psychosocial rather than demographic needs.

Specifically, psychosocial needs emphasize interpersonal aspects of mentoring relationships (Allen et al., 2004). Psychosocial needs may refer to functions that are specific to mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985) or, more broadly, social identifiers that individuals bring to relationships (Upton, 2013). For example, psychosocial factors such as social support, loneliness, marriage status, social disruption, bereavement, work environment, social status, and social integration have been identified. However, specific to mentoring relationships, Kram (1985) found that psychosocial mentoring functions included role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship. And when mentors helped mentees based on psychosocial needs, the mentor boosted the mentee's confidence, helped them define identity, and helped them evaluate their professional capabilities (Kram, 1985). Mentors who support psychosocial needs are likely to model behaviors and offer emotional acceptance or confirmation while also providing the mentee with counseling and friendship (Allen et al., 2004). Further, compared to career or structural factors, psychosocial aspects of mentoring are more highly related to protégé satisfaction with mentoring relationships and deepen bonds between mentoring partners (Kram, 1985). Additionally, the ability to communicate well and competently is essential for both mentors and mentees (Wiemann, 1977). Mentors must possess self-worth and believe in their abilities to help others (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993). Mentees must trust and respect their mentors for mentoring to be successful because emotional connections such as familiarity, closeness, and trust are the foundation of mentoring relationships (Bell et al., 2000; Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000). Both mentoring partners must invest time, energy, and emotions to form and maintain relationships (Schulz, 1995).

Finally, mentoring relationships develop through four phases: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1985). In the initiation stage, the mentoring pair learns about each other and are more likely to share information akin to advising, such as career or disciplinary knowledge (Dixon et al., 2012). Interpersonal bonds grow in the cultivation stage as the partners exchange ideas and build trust (Dixon et al., 2012). The pair may become co-creators as they share experiences. Next, separation is perhaps the most important phase (Kram, 1985), allowing the mentee to demonstrate their independence and gain confidence (Schulz, 1995). If the mentoring pair does not part after the separation phase, the relationship moves into the redefinition phase. In redefinition, the pair form a long-lasting, perhaps even life-long, relationship of continuous mentoring (Montgomery, 2017). Mentoring relationships often grow even stronger when the former mentee becomes a mentor themselves (Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

Types of Mentoring

Two types of mentoring relationships—informal vs. formal—exist based on how those relationships were formed. Informal mentoring generally happens spontaneously when people identify a connection and decide to enter into a supportive relationship. This connection can occur whether a mentor approaches a mentee or vice versa (Chao et al., 1992; Edmondson, 2012; Grant, 2015; Monroe et al., 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). However, some researchers caution that informal relationships can allow organizational and cultural barriers to continue (Füger & Höppel, 2011).

Alternately, formal mentoring gained popularity in the 21st century (De Vries & Webb, 2006; Haynes & Petrosko, 2009). In formal mentoring, an independent third party matches mentors with mentees, often using the needs or wants of the mentee to make that match (Chao et al., 1992; Grant, 2015; Monroe, et al., 2008; Montgomery, 2017: Montgomery et al., 2014; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Redmond, 1990; Wallace, et al., 2014). People in formal mentoring relationships may have weaker emotional connections due to the matching process, and these pairs may focus on career needs rather than psychosocial ones (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Although mentoring is typically imagined as being either informal or formal, other types of mentorships exist. Developmental mentoring is considered an effective form of mentoring that builds on learning and experience (Clutterbuck, 2008), focusing on networking and providing guidance and advice (Alean-Kirlpatrick, 2011). Developmental mentors often challenge mentees to take the lead and determine their mentorship goals by planning and acquiring resources. This task empowers the mentee by developing personal accountability, building self-resourcefulness, and leveling the power balance between the mentoring pair (Clutterbuck, 2008).

Among other types of mentoring, comprehensive mentoring refers to when a mentee recognizes many mentoring needs and seeks different mentors at different times to meet these needs (Anderson, et al., 2012; Griffin & Toldson, 2012). Maintenance mentoring helps a mentee advance through a plan of study or career path, working toward accomplishing one major goal, such as earning a college degree (Montgomery, 2017). Similarly, transitional mentoring helps a person move from one career stage to another, such as advancing from graduate student to faculty member (Montgomery, 2017), while aspirational mentors help their mentees plan for future roles or positions, such as a move to administration (Montgomery, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Finally, continuous mentorship reflects long-term relationships between mentoring partners that may span the entirety of a mentee's career (Montgomery, 2017).

Benefits and Importance of Mentoring

While mentoring relationships often emphasize benefits for mentees, they also benefit mentors, organizations, and society (Schulz, 1995). Because mentoring allows for collaboration and experiential learning, it may be one of the most important developmental aspects of adulthood (Bova, 1987). Mentorship is often bidirectional or reciprocal in nature, and both mentees and mentors benefit from their engagement and experiences (Chesler & Chesler, 2002; Greco, 2014; Lechuga, 2011; Long et al., 2013; McGee, et al., 2015; McKinsey, 2016). Research broadly suggests that mentorship can lead to career advancement, a sense of satisfaction and belonging, and boosted confidence (Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, 2017), but there are also more nuanced benefits for both mentees and mentors.

As expected, mentorship benefits mentees in various ways. Mentoring allows mentees to learn and grow from failure in safe environments (Schulz, 1995). Mentees may ask mentors questions they are afraid to ask of others, such as seeking advice about or protection from political or other uncomfortable situations (Kram, 1983; Schulz, 1995). Mentees also benefit from their mentor's shared knowledge, career planning, improved professional skills, and competence awareness (Schmidt & Faber, 2016). Good mentorship can also help mentees advance their careers through networking and visibility (Schmidt & Faber, 2016). In addition to gaining self-confidence from mentoring, mentees often strengthen their well-being by learning more about life-work balance from their mentors (Schmidt & Faber, 2016). When mentees receive good mentoring, they are often inspired to give back and, in return, offer their time as mentors, building a source of mentorship for a new generation (Plank Center, 2017; Schulz, 1995).

Notably, the bidirectional and reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships also yields distinct benefits for mentors. Research suggests that mentors achieve self-awareness and learn to capitalize on their personal strengths through mentoring duties (Schmidt & Faber, 2016; Kram, 1983; Schulz, 1995). As mentors are typically established in their careers, they often share their experiences and knowledge with others, affording the mentor added respect (Schulz, 1995) and recognition as a leader or knowledge expert (Kram, 1983). Mentors also improve their leadership, collegiality, and communication skills through mentoring engagement (Schmidt & Faber, 2016). Additionally, mentors learn from their mentees as they become exposed to new skills, ideas, and self-discoveries when they answer questions, think through their career paths, and re-examine how and why they made certain choices (Schulz, 1995). Expanded networks, stronger relationships, institutional recognition, increased awareness of gender structures, and personal satisfaction are also outcomes of mentoring relationships for mentors (Schmidt & Faber, 2016).

This is not to say that there are only positive outcomes from mentoring relationships; however, scant research exists examining the negative effects of mentoring (Eby & Allen, 2002). For example, research shows that distancing and manipulative behaviors and poor dyadic fit are consistent factors leading to perceived negative mentoring experiences (Eby & Allen, 2002). And research on graduate student mentoring suggests that poor mentoring can have negative career and psychosocial effects (Tuma et al., 2021). Even so, because this area of research is still growing and generally privileges the protégé perspective, and because most mentorship research focuses on positive outcomes and best practices, the negative effects of mentoring are not fully discussed here.

In short, mentoring relationships cannot be defined in simplistic terms or linear constructs. They are dynamic, needs-based, reciprocal relationships that are as defined by time and experience as they are by emotional and psychosocial factors important to both mentoring partners. And it is with these qualities in mind that the PRD mentoring program has been designed and developed. Although the program is formal because it serves as an independent third party that recruits and pairs mentoring partners, the goal is to facilitate the growth of less formal mentoring relationships. Both mentors and mentees can indicate which demographic characteristics, psychosocial factors, and professional issues they wish to prioritize. Each year, mentoring pairs are encouraged to meet during a planned conference event, which is designed to facilitate the initial contact between participants while sharing best practices for maintaining the relationships. Finally, there is no system for tracking the progress or outcomes of mentoring relationships, although program managers share resources and tips throughout the year to encourage mentoring pairs to meet in some capacity. With this context for the study in mind, it also seems discipline-specific factors should be included in any understanding of mentorship.

Mentoring in Public Relations Education

Formal mentorship is considered a determinant of positive career outcomes (van der Weijden, et al., 2015), especially regarding teaching (Peirce & Martinez, 2012). Contributing factors such as gender, race, the added responsibility of dependents, and the structure of mentorship relationships (such as co-learning and peer-to-peer mentoring) have been investigated in various academic fields (Ogan & Robinson, 2008, Sarikakis, 2003; Totleben & Deiss, 2015). For example, research on female public relations professionals shows that while there are distinct career-related benefits to mentoring relationships, many in the field do not have meaningful mentoring relationships (Meng & Neill, 2021). Yet, few studies have considered mentorship in public relations education, which often requires professionalization in both corporate and academic contexts.

The few studies of public relations scholar-to-scholar mentorship have focused on the learning modalities involved (Pardun et al., 2015) and the impacts of gender and ethnic identity on mentoring pair relationships (Pompper & Adams, 2006; Waymer, 2012). For example, the importance of factors such as shared racial identity experiences and ongoing emotional support can make academic mentors into close friends or even role models (Waymer, 2012). To date, no formal research of public relations mentorship has produced best practices to emulate or has considered the topic from a longitudinal perspective, examining how relationships evolve as participants' careers progress.

Based on this review of mentorship, types of mentoring, and mentoring outcomes, there exists an opportunity to understand the quality and experience of public relations scholars participating in a formal mentoring program. Mentoring partnerships can focus on both professional and personal development opportunities. Additionally, because mentoring partners in the target program are encouraged to build partnerships that best meet personal needs, both structural and psychosocial factors that impact the success and positive perceptions of mentoring relationships can be examined. These items can include the structure of the relationship (e.g., frequency of contact and physical distance between partners) and the importance of psychosocial factors (e.g., responsivity, confidentiality) leading to satisfaction in mentoring partnerships. This study examines these concepts to identify the factors shaping perceptions of positive mentorship relationships and relationship outcomes in the context of an academic public relations mentoring program. Three broad research questions guided this exploratory study:

> **RQ1:** What structural factors are associated with positive PR educator mentoring relationships?
> **RQ2:** What psychosocial factors are associated with positive PR educator mentoring relationships?
> **RQ3:** How do perceptions of mentoring relationship outcomes differ between mentors and mentees?

Method

To understand perceptions of the mentoring program, two surveys about the program were used to understand program participant experiences. This section includes an overview of mentoring program participant data. Next, data collection and analysis methods are described.

Mentoring Program Data

Data collected since the beginning of the PRD Mentorship Program shows a relatively consistent number of participants per year (see Table 1). Since 2017, $n = 96$ individual members have participated in the program. Mentoring partners were primarily female ($n = 75$, 78.12%). Following a concerted recruitment effort in 2019-20, the program saw a significant jump in mentoring pairs ($n = 36$). That year, $n = 7$ (7.29%) participants participated as both mentors and mentees. Additionally, three mentoring pairs formally continued in the program starting in 2017-18;

however, anecdotal evidence shows that additional mentoring relationships have continued outside of the program.

Table 1: PRD Mentor Program Participation

Year	*N* = Pairs	*N* = Unique Participants	*n* = Dual Mentor/Mentee
2014-15	13	26	N/A
2015-16	30	62	N/A
2016-17	16	32	N/A
2017-18	20	38	2
2018-19	14	28	0
2019-20	36	63	7

Mentoring Program Survey

To monitor the growth of the mentoring program, the PRD membership committee distributed surveys to explore participant perceptions of their experiences. These surveys were designed to understand participant engagement with the program and opportunities for program growth. Of the distributed surveys, those sent in 2016 and 2020 received meaningful response rates, offering this opportunity for longitudinal analysis.

Surveys were distributed with minimal modifications. Changes to the 2020 survey were based on open-ended responses to the 2016 survey, an interest in exploring anecdotal evidence, and an effort to include items that align with existing mentoring literature. Data was collected anonymously, and both mentors and mentees were recruited via email addresses provided via program applications. To understand the quality of the program, participants were asked whether they found the program useful, would recommend the program, and would participate again. They were also asked about the results of their mentoring relationship including whether they put enough time into the relationship, planned to stay in touch with their mentoring partner, and found their relationship successful. Items exploring psychosocial relationship-building factors focused on whether partners were responsive to communication, seemed committed to relationships, and fostered a sense of trust. Items were also designed to understand structural factors such as how communication occurs, including which partner was more likely to initiate contact, which tools were used to communicate, and how frequently communication occurred. Participants were asked about the areas in which they received mentoring (e.g., strengthening scholarship, strengthening teaching, strategizing job searches). Due to the number of participants in the program, and to protect participant anonymity, the only demographic information gathered in 2016 was academic rank. Additional demographic data was gathered in 2020. Table 2 shows participant data from both the 2016 (62.5% response rate) and 2020 (53.97% response rate) surveys.

Table 2: Survey Participant Demographics

		2016		2020	
		n	%	*n*	%
Role	Mentee	12	48.0%	20	60.6%
	Mentor	13	52.0%	14	42.4%
Academic Rank	Graduate Student	5	20.0%	10	30.3%
	Assistant Professor	8	32.0%	9	27.3%
	Associate Professor	5	20.0%	8	24.2%
	Full Professor	3	12.0%	5	15.2%
	Professor Emerita(us)	1	4.0%	1	3.0%
	Other	1	4.0%	0	0%

Gender	Female	Gender and Race Data Not Collected in 2016 Survey	24	72.7%
	Male		9	27.3%
Race	African-American		1	3.0%
	Asian-American		3	9.1%
	Caucasian		19	57.6%
	Hispanic		1	3.0%
	Non-Hispanic		8	24.2%
	Other		6	18.2%

Results

In this section, results from both the 2016 and 2020 surveys are presented concurrently. The results explore the structural and psychosocial factors addressed in the research questions. Additionally, why participants chose to be part of the mentoring program is outlined for context.

Among the most popular reasons for seeking mentorship, participants sought support for strategizing job searches, strengthening scholarship, and adjusting to faculty positions. Further, additional categories were added to the 2020 survey based on “Other” responses provided in 2016. As shown in Table 3, the range of motivations for joining the mentoring program shows a balanced need for both structural and psychosocial outcomes.

Table 3: Motivations for Joining Mentoring Program

	2016		2020	
Motivations	*n*	%	*n*	%
Strengthen Scholarship	15	60%	12	36.4%
Strengthen Teaching	5	20%	7	21.2%
Evaluate Strengths/ Weaknesses	6	24%	10	30.3%
Strategize Job Search	11	44%	13	39.4%

Talk About Tenure	10	40%	9	27.3%
Adjust to Faculty Position	8	32%	11	33.3%
Talk About Promotion	3	12%	6	18.2%
Adjust to (non)Diverse Campus	2	8%	2	6.1%
Adjust to Doctoral Program	4	16%	3	9.1%
Consider Career Paths	6	24%	10	30.3%
Work/Life Balance		N/A	7	21.2%
Research Direction		N/A	7	21.2%
Scholarly Material Review		N/A	2	6.1%
Dealing with Specific Situations		N/A	10	30.3%
Enhance Professional Experiences		N/A	7	21.2%
Other	9	36%	9	27.3%

Structural Factors Influencing Mentoring Relationships

To begin understanding qualities that contribute to positive mentoring relationships, RQ1 focused on exploring the structural factors that lead to more positive mentoring experiences. Structural factors of a mentoring relationship may include organization-based influences such as location of the program, physical distance between mentoring partners, and frequency of contact. As expected, the mentoring program examined in this study is just one source of mentoring for public relations educators. Most participants completing the 2020 survey indicated they received mentoring at their home institutions (n = 24, 72.7%), and others received non-academic mentoring (n = 10, 30.3%).

First, 2020 participants (n = 33) somewhat agreed they put enough time into the mentoring relationship (M = 4.73, SD = 1.68) and found their mentoring partner was responsive to communication (M = 4.76, SD = 2.09). These findings represented a small dip in perceptions from the 2016 survey, when participants (n = 24) agreed they put in enough time (M = 5.29, SD = 1.73) and found their mentor responsive (M = 5.88, SD = 1.70). However, using a bipolar scale with 1 indicating the participant was most likely to initiate contact and 7 indicating the mentoring partner was most likely to initiate contact, 2020 participants generally indicated they were more likely than their partners to initiate contact (M = 2.76, SD = 1.786). However, mentees from both surveys indicated they were slightly (but not significantly) more likely to initiate contact (**2016:** M = 3.0, SD = 1.81; **2020:** M = 2.54, SD = 1.67) than mentors (**2016:** M = 4.25, SD = 1.87; **2020:** M = 3.00, SD = 1.89).

Next, participants in both surveys indicated that communication primarily occurred via email, but phone and in-person conversations were also used for mentoring meetings (see Table 4). Video conferencing was reported by fewer participants, although it is worth noting that data was collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding frequency of contact, participants indicated various communication timeframes, with most participants indicating that communication occurred at varying frequencies (see Table 4). For example, some participants met once, such as at AEJMC. Others met at frequencies that "varied throughout the year," while some participants reported making initial contact but never actually having a meeting.

Another structural factor considered here is the academic rank of participants. As expected, Chi-square analysis showed that in 2020 mentors were significantly more likely to be senior faculty members at the rank of associate professor (n = 8, 24.2%) or higher (n = 6, 18.2%), while mentees were either graduate students (n = 10, 30.3%) or assistant professors (n = 3, 9.1%), $\chi 2$ = (8, N = 33) = 27.73, p = .001. The same trend occurred in the 2016 survey, (χ2 = 15.49, p = .008).

Table 4: Communication Methods and Frequencies

		2016		2020	
		n	%	*n*	%
Method	Email	22	88%	30	90.9%
	In Person	12	48%	12	36.4%
	Phone	9	36%	12	36.4%
	Skype/Video	6	24%	4	12.1%
Frequencies	Monthly	5	20%	6	18.2%
	Quarterly	7	28%	5	15.2%
	Each Semester	6	24%	6	18.2%
	Other	6	24%	16	48.5%

to recruit mentees to begin serving as mentors, which also helps enhance perceptions of mentorship satisfaction (Plank Center, 2017; Schulz, 1995). And, if there were problems with the partnership, these could be confidentially reported to the program so it can continue to monitor and adjust recommendations for building successful mentorship relationships.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the insights provided, notable limitations exist in this study that warrant further exploration. First, the differences noted between mentor and mentee perceptions in the 2020 study may be attributed to the fact that more mentors than mentees responded to the survey (n = 20 mentors, n = 14 mentees). This potentially skewed the data regarding perceptions among the mentor group. This is also noted because the 2016 survey had a better balance of mentors and mentees participants. Future research should aim for a more balanced set of participants to identify whether the statistical patterns hold.

Next, because the 2020 survey data showed marked differences in perceptions of relationship outcomes and program benefits between mentors and mentees, qualitative analysis may help illuminate why those differences existed. Data showed that even among mentees there appeared to be significantly different perceptions of the program quality and outcomes. However, among mentees, there may have been a sincere interest in reporting honest, if unfavorable, feedback to provide opportunities to strengthen the program. This is posited because participants found the program valuable overall, even when they did not have positive individual experiences. Continued longitudinal analysis supplemented with qualitative research may illustrate how and why such different perceptions emerged.

Similarly, the small number of minority-identifying and male participants in the study prevented an analysis of potential differences in mentoring experiences compared to those of white females. For example, although the ratio of female to male participants reflected the general ratio of program participants based on gender, this difference in participation could speak to gender gaps that exist in practice. This evokes existing public relations scholarship that suggests gender and racial identity often influence both the quality and the long-term career relevance of mentoring relationships (Pompper & Adams, 2006: Waymer, 2012). Initial findings from this study suggest additional research on this and similar mentoring programs could provide a fruitful avenue of research both because public relations is a predominantly white, female field and because many of the psychosocial factors related to mentoring are often gendered (whether fairly or accurately) as female. Future research should consider whether males or females are more willing to participate in mentoring programs, and why; the experiences of minority-identifying mentoring partners and whether that influences their willingness to participate in formal programs; opportunities to make mentoring programs more inclusive; and how to address gender and other identity-based influences in mentoring relationships, particularly in public relations.

Finally, this study was limited in scope as it focused on one mentorship program. Future research should consider using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the factors influencing successful mentorship programs being developed for other membership associations or professional and academic organizations such as the Public Relations Student Society of America or on-campus mentoring programs.

Psychosocial Factors Influencing Mentoring Relationships

To continue exploring qualities that contribute to positive mentoring relationships, RQ2 emphasizes an analysis of psychosocial factors. Psychosocial needs generally include attending to more personal issues such as boosting confidence, defining identity, or evaluating abilities. Results suggest that building interpersonal relationships and fostering a trust-based environment were key psychosocial factors influencing the perceived quality of mentoring relationships.

In the 2020 survey, participants were asked to reflect on the quality of their mentoring relationships to set a baseline understanding of participant perceptions. On average, participants neither agreed nor disagreed that their mentoring partner seemed committed to the relationship ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 2.11$) but they somewhat agreed they were able to have confidential conversations with ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 2.08$) and trusted ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 2.05$) their mentoring partners. Notably, large standard deviations suggest that participants had widely varying experiences in the program.

Both surveys also showed that participants were interested in receiving mentoring about issues beyond how to meet specific job requirements related to teaching, research, and service (refer to Table 3). As previously outlined, participants were particularly interested in strengthening scholarship and strategizing job searches. However, they also sought mentoring for adjusting to faculty positions, considering career paths, and dealing with specific situations. Notably, participants' responses suggested that psychosocial factors such as having shared life experiences (such as being a mother) and shared academic goals and ambitions were beneficial to both positive outcomes and relationship development. Unsurprisingly, and as will be discussed, trust was a significant factor for both mentors and mentees who reported positive partnership outcomes. In 2016, strong relationships emerged among those who would continue participating in the program; they were more likely to recommend the program ($r = .916$, $p < .000$) and find the program useful ($r = .916$, $p < .000$). Those who planned to stay in touch with their partner were also more likely to report the relationship leading to positive results ($r = .911$, $p < .000$). However, these numbers dipped in the 2020 survey. Those who would continue participating in the program were somewhat less likely to recommend the program ($r = .776$, $p < .001$) and find the program useful ($p = .612$, $p < .001$).

Correlation analysis from both the 2016 and 2020 surveys showed that increased responsivity and trust correlated with more positive mentoring relationship experiences and longevity. For example, in 2016, the strongest relationship existed between trusting one's partner and the partner being responsive to communication ($r = .955$, $p < .000$). There was little change to this relationship in the 2020 survey ($r = .830$, $p < .001$). This finding was notable because other relationships related to trusting the mentoring partner existed but were not as strong. For example, trusting a partner correlated with increased plans to stay in touch (**2016:** $r = .884$, $p < .000$; **2020:** $r = .815$, $p < .001$) and believing the relationship led to positive results (**2016:** $r = .881$, $p < .000$, 2020: $r = .819$, $p < .001$).

Building on the 2016 results, the 2020 survey showed the importance of mentoring partners being responsive to communication and offering a sense of confidentiality in the relationship. Those who experienced responsive relationships were significantly more likely to recommend the program ($p = .800$, $p < .001$), believe their relationships were successful ($p = .796$, $p < .001$), and believe their relationships led to positive results ($p = .894$, p < .001). Further, those who trusted their partners were significantly more likely to recommend the program (p = .849, $p < .001$), and believe the relationship was successful (p = .884, $p < .001$). Trust was also positively related to being able to have confidential conversations (p = .924, $p < .001$) and perceiving the mentoring partner as responsive (p = .830, $p < .001$). And being able to have confidential conversations with mentoring partners increased the likelihood of believing the mentoring relationship was successful (p = .906, $p < .001$). In short, psychosocial qualities of both responsivity and confidentiality were key factors related to trust in these relationships, and pairs that planned to continue their relationship were more likely to report benefits and consequently recommend the program to others.

Perceptions of Mentoring Outcomes

Existing definitions of mentoring emphasize one-way, top-down communication (Montgomery, 2017), wherein a mentor with more experience supports a mentee who may be a junior colleague (Allen et al., 2004). This nature of mentoring relationships may lead to power differentials between partners. Because of this situation, RQ3 explored how perceptions of mentoring relationship outcomes differed between mentors and mentees. To answer this question, results are described both among and between groups.

Overall Perceptions of Mentoring Outcomes

Participants in both surveys indicated they would recommend the PRD's mentorship program and would consider participating in the program again (See Table 5). However, in 2020, they only somewhat agreed that their mentoring relationship was successful (M = 4.55, SD = 2.03) and that the mentoring program led to positive results (M = 4.61, SD = 1.92). Large standard deviations suggest a wide range of perceptions about success of the relationships. Even so, participants across both surveys agreed they planned to stay in touch with their mentoring partner; and in 2020, n = 16 (48.5%) participants indicated they planned to continue their partnership.

Table 5: Perception Comparisons from 2016 and 2020 Surveys

	2016			2020		
Item	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
I would recommend the PRD's mentorship program to colleagues.	24	6.29	1.16	33	5.06	1.80
I would consider participating in the PRD mentorship program again.	24	6.25	1.07	33	5.55	1.68
I plan to stay in touch with my mentoring partner.	24	6.0	1.67	33	5.12	2.0
I believe my mentoring relationship was successful.	24	5.83	1.61	33	4.55	2.03
My mentoring relationship led to positive results for me.	23	5.70	1.58	33	4.61	1.92
The PRD mentorship program is useful.	23	6.3	1.19	33	5.61	1.48
I trust my mentoring partner.	24	6.0	1.45	33	4.85	2.05

Next, although both mentors and mentees agreed the program was useful (**2016:** $M = 6.3$, $SD = 1.16$; **2020:** $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.48$), overall positive perceptions of the program were not as pronounced in the 2020 survey (See Table 5). Additionally, results from the 2020 survey showed significant, practical differences between mentor and mentee perceptions of positive program outcomes.

Differing Perceptions between Mentors and Mentees

In 2016, independent samples t-tests showed no significant differences in perceptions of partnership outcomes between mentors and mentees. However, significant differences between mentor and mentee perceptions emerged in the 2020 survey results.

As previously discussed, trust was a key psychosocial factor related to positive outcomes. However, mentors were significantly more likely to agree that they trusted their partners (see Table 6). Similarly, across multiple items mentors at least somewhat agreed they had positive experiences, whereas mentees reported somewhat disagreeing or neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the same items. Additionally, large standard deviations among mentee perceptions also suggest that mentees had widely varying experiences—more than participating mentors. On average, mentees were significantly less likely to consider participating in the program again, were not sure of whether they planned to stay in touch with their mentoring partners, and did not consider their relationships successful. For example, among the noted discrepancies, mentors (n = 12, 36.4%) were more likely than mentees (n = 4, 12.1%) to plan to continue their partnership. Moreover, among the n = 4 (12.1%) participants who did not plan to continue their partnership because it was not a valuable experience, n = 3 respondents were mentees. Additionally, mentees generally disagreed that their mentoring relationships were successful, while mentors somewhat agreed their relationships were successful. Mentors were also more likely to feel they could have confidential conversations and that they trusted their mentoring partners.

Table 6: t-Test Results Comparing Mentor and Mentee Perceptions of Program Outcomes

	Mentor		Mentee				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
I would recommend the PRD’s mentorship program to colleagues.	5.74	.991	4.31	2.25	30	2.46	.020
I would consider participating in the PRD mentorship program again.	6.26	.733	4.77	2.09	30	2.89	.004
I plan to stay in touch with my mentoring partner.	5.89	1.29	3.92	2.36	30	3.05	.005
I believe my mentoring relationship was successful.	5.26	1.33	3.69	2.50	30	2.32	.028
My mentoring relationship led to positive results for me.	5.16	1.26	4.0	2.45	30	1.76	.089
The PRD mentorship program is useful.	5.95	.97	5.0	1.91	30	1.85	.075

My mentoring partner was responsive to my communication.*	5.26	1.82	4.23	2.32	21.72	1.35	.192
My mentoring partner seemed committed to our relationship.*	5.16	1.74	3.62	2.29	21.14	2.05	.053
I was able to have confidential conversations with my mentoring partner.	5.47	1.50	3.92	2.43	30	2.23	.033
I trust my mentoring partner.	5.68	1.38	3.85	2.34	30	2.80	.009

*Levene's Test for Equality of Variances not assumed

Despite these differences, results suggest similar perceptions of mentoring relationship outcomes on a few key items. For example, both mentors and mentees somewhat agreed that their mentoring relationships led to positive results and that the program is useful. These findings suggest that while there are potential differences in perceptions of nuanced partnership outcomes between mentors and mentees, a holistic analysis of mentoring partnerships yielded generally positive responses.

Discussion

This study offers an opportunity to explore perceptions of an academic public relations mentoring program across a five-year period. Analysis of two quantitative surveys distributed to program participants suggest the value of emphasizing psychosocial factors over structural factors when evaluating the positive perceptions of mentoring relationships. Specifically, key findings point to (1) the importance of building trust in relationships and (2) the need to understand differing perceptions among mentors and mentees. Practical recommendations for guiding participants in mentoring programs are provided.

The Need to Build Trust

Unsurprisingly, trust emerged as a key factor in evaluating the quality of mentoring relationships. Most important, however, are the factors that contributed to building trust and the outcomes of building trust in these relationships.

Trust seemed particularly influenced by a simple act: responsivity. Simply hearing back from mentoring partners seemingly set a tone in relationships. It allowed participants to feel they could more confidently communicate with their mentoring partners, for example by reaching out with random or unplanned questions. Additionally, responsivity and trust were positively related to participants feeling more confident about having confidential conversations, building to a sense of openness in relationships. And, overall, the more participants felt a sense of trust, responsivity, and confidentiality in their mentoring relationships, the more likely they were to plan to stay in touch with their partner and believe their relationship led to positive results.

This finding suggests that psychosocial factors based on positive interpersonal interactions contributed to successful mentoring partnerships, strengthened relationships, and greater satisfaction. This aligns with foundational mentorship research that suggests meeting psychosocial needs, rather than structural factors, leads to more satisfying and deeper mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985). Existing mentorship research highlights the importance of role modeling, acceptance, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1985). Arguably, the simple act of being responsive could create an environment in which these psychosocial needs are met. Being responsive might model best practices, create a sense of acceptance for mentees, and foster an environment that helps mentees feel comfortable seeking counseling and advice. And the more a mentor fosters a sense of trust, particularly in a smaller academic circle such as that found in public relations, then the more opportunity there might be to develop friendships. This finding builds on the literature that defines mentorship as a dynamic, reciprocal relationship based on trust and sharing (Bova, 1987; Chesler & Chesler, 2002; Greco, 2014; Lechuga, 2011; Long et al., 2013;

McGee, et al., 2015; McKinsey, 2016). And this is suggested particularly because structural factors related to time, distance, or communication modality had little effect on the perceived positive outcomes of the mentoring relationships.

The Gap Between Mentors and Mentees

Although the findings suggest that responsivity, trust, and confidentiality are positively related to increased positive perceptions of mentoring relationships, notable gaps existed in perceptions between mentors and mentees. Findings suggest that naturally occurring power differentials not only impact that quality of relationships, but also may need to be addressed by mentors.

First, large standard deviations in the data show that participants had widely varying experiences in and perceptions of the mentoring program. These differences became particularly noticeable when parsing the data between mentors and mentee participants. Existing research provides evidence that mentees do not always perceive positive benefits to mentorship (Tuma et al., 2021). Further, negative personal behaviors and good dyadic fit can lead to poor mentorship experiences (Eby & Allen, 2002). Here, standard deviations were much larger for mentees, suggesting that they had a greater variety of experiences in the program. Previous research exploring graduate student perceptions (Tuma et al., 2021) is relevant here because many participants in the program identified as doctoral students. The unexplored issues here are why mentees felt they had different experiences. For example, mentees were significantly less likely to recommend and keep participating in the program. They were also less likely to stay in touch with their partner and believe the relationship was successful. Existing research has found that negative mentoring experiences can lead to negative career and psychosocial outcomes (Scandura, 1998; Tuma et al., 2021). As will be discussed, future research might consider exploring why and how participants had such different individual experiences and whether career and psychosocial or other factors influenced perceptions of the mentorship participants received. This is recommended in part because mentees still found the program useful even though they had mixed beliefs about whether their relationship led to positive results.

To that end, mentors had significantly more positive perceptions of their relationships and outcomes. They reported being more comfortable with confidential conversations and felt they were more responsive. However, this arguably speaks to the natural power differentials that exist in mentoring relationships. Mentors are more experienced (Allen & Eby, 2002, Allen et al., 2004; Montgomery, 2017) and likely have less to lose in these relationships; conversely, mentees may feel unsure of the degree to which they can speak about confidential or sensitive issues. Academic communities—especially public relations—can feel very small, which may lead mentees to feeling less power and control in formally established mentoring relationships. This dynamic may lead to mentee concerns about sharing confidential information, while mentors more likely see themselves as an open book and font of knowledge willing to share their learned experiences. The concern, then, is how to break down perceived power differences and more closely align mentor and mentee perceptions.

Building Better Mentoring Partnerships

Based on the findings, multiple strategies can be used to strengthen both relationships formed through formal mentoring programs and the structure of mentoring programs through which these relationships are formed. These are discussed in turn.

Strengthening Individual Mentorship

Research shows that formal mentoring programs can lead to weaker psychosocial connections between mentoring partners because of the structured matching process (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). To counter this, building responsive communication should be emphasized, and both mentors and mentees can adopt practices to help foster positive, mutually beneficial relationships regardless of the type of mentoring being performed (Montgomery, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

First in regard to suggested practices, if the base behavior to building trust is responsivity, it is notable that mentors perceived themselves as more responsive than mentees judged them to be. Data from both surveys showed that mentees felt they were more likely to initiate contact. Considering responsivity is a simple approach to building trust, and considering the role of power in mentoring relationships, having the mentor initiate contact can show a recognition of and attempt to break down these barriers. At its base level, this step involves the mentor initiating contact; at that point, the mentee should offer the same level of responsivity as is valued from the mentor. Next, early in the relationships, the mentoring partners should mutually define the structure of the relationship and communication expectations. This definition includes addressing the preferred frequency and method of contact to set expectations and provide a defined structure for communication. Goals for the partnership should also be shared early in the relationship.

Next, to facilitate confidential conversations, create openness, and build trust, the mentor should be responsible for assuring the mentee both verbally and non-verbally that conversations are confidential and designed to support the mentee both professionally and personally. Many mentees—especially if they are new to formal mentoring programs and are paired with someone they do not know personally—may be hesitant to share sensitive information. This can involve confirming the confidentiality of conversations or offering opportunities for the mentee to communicate using tools that evoke a feeling of safety (for example, communicating by voice rather than email).

Additionally, the mentor should consider how they can support their mentee by reflecting on what they learned through mentoring (Alean-

Kirlpatrick, 2011; Clutterbuck, 2008). For graduate students and new tenure-track faculty, it can be difficult to know what type of mentoring to seek or questions to ask: We don't know what we don't know. This is not to suggest that mentees should adopt a stance of tabula rasa, but to acknowledge that professional growth and learning often happens through experience that mentees may not have. Here, the role of a mentor can be to consider what information they wish they had known, or perhaps ask about specific topics that may be important to mentees based on their career standing or trajectory. Further, results suggest that more than seeking mentorship on structural expectations related to teaching, research, and service, mentees often seek support for psychosocial needs related to these areas. Sometimes the mentee simply needs someone to help them build confidence, define their identity, and sincerely evaluate their professional abilities (Kram, 1985). In this context, mentees may be interested in considering how to balance personal experiences (such as parenthood or partnership) and full-time academic work. They may seek advice about types of service needed to meet long-term goals or how to overcome challenges related to completing research at different types of institutions. More personally, they may seek advice for dealing with issues related to discrimination based on gender, race, or other diversities. A mentor who has had these experiences or can speak to these professional development issues can foster an environment of trust by being open about their own experiences and broaching issues they wished someone had addressed with them (or were fortunate enough to have someone address).

Finally, if the mentee knows that psychosocial factors are a key reason for seeking mentorship, they should consider sharing information about the specific and transitional issues for which they want support with both their mentor and those organizing the formal program (Montgomery, 2017; Yosso, 2005). For example, one may ask to be paired with someone who is a mother of young children or works at an institution that lacks diversity. By sharing this information early in the mentoring relationship, the mentee can help the mentor understand how to support their development and foster a partnership that eventually leads to a balanced, mutually beneficial, and satisfying relationship.

Strengthening the Mentoring Program

Results also point to potential recommendations for strengthening both the AEJMC Public Relations Division and other mentoring programs.

First, the program should take into consideration both the value of psychosocial mentoring functions (Kram, 1985) and the challenge that arises wherein formal mentoring programs often emphasize pairing partners based on career rather than psychosocial needs (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In recent years, the PRD Mentoring Program has added options for both mentors and mentees to identify what characteristics and support they seek in and from a partner. For example, mentees can indicate they would like a female mentor who has a family or children. By creating partnerships based on psychosocial factors, and by informing participants these were the guiding factors, it may be possible to enhance the emotional connections that sometimes get lost when third party matches are made.

Next, it may be valuable for the program to define more concretely how participation in the program can play an active role in diversifying mentoring options for faculty. For example, comprehensive mentoring occurs when a mentee recognizes they have different mentoring needs that may require different forms of advice or mentorship (Anderson, et al., 2012; Griffin & Toldson, 2012). A program such as the one run by the PRD may benefit from specifically outlining how it offers a service that can provide individuals additional mentoring options based on their specific mentoring needs.

Finally, mentoring relationships often develop through four phases of initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1985). A review of program practices suggests that initiation and cultivation opportunities may be fostered by the program, but less is done to facilitate separation and redefinition—this could potentially lead to feelings of dissatisfaction among program participants. Specifically, the program facilitates the initiation stage by giving partners a chance to meet at the annual conference. At that time, program leaders present information about best mentoring practices and share a tip sheet and the Plank Center Mentoring Guide (Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, 2017) with participants. It may also be helpful to create a mentoring worksheet that asks mentoring pairs to outline what psychosocial and structural goals they have for the year. Next, the program attempts to support relationship cultivation by sharing mentoring resources and sending check-in reminders during the year. This has been met with positive feedback from participants, who have indicated it serves as a reminder to stay in touch with their mentoring partners. However, the program does not yet have in place resources for facilitating the separation and redefinition phases. Although mentoring partners are offered the opportunity to continue their pairings from year to year, no information is shared regarding how to end the mentoring relationship and what to expect. This can lead to relationships ending abruptly, which may lead to an increased sense of dissatisfaction among participants who may have less mentorship experience. The program should consider hosting an end-of-year event or check-in opportunity that encourages mentoring partners to reconvene and discuss whether and how mentoring goals were met. This could also help partners consider whether they wish to redefine their relationship (Montgomery, 2017) or possibly serve as an opportunity for the program to recruit mentees to begin serving as mentors, which also helps enhance perceptions of mentorship satisfaction (Plank Center, 2017; Schulz, 1995). And, if there were problems with the partnership, these could be confidentially reported to the program so it can continue to monitor and adjust recommendations for building successful mentorship relationships.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

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Teaching Philanthropy: How Can Public Relations Courses Prepare Future Fundraisers and Motivate Giving?

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have suggested that fundraising education is a specialty of public relations. This study examines how a fundraising-specific service-learning project may help prepare future fundraisers and motivate giving. A survey of qualitative and quantitative data was administered to public relations students in a fundraising-focused class and in other service-learning classes at a major public university. Students in the fundraising-focused class were more knowledgeable about nonprofits but were not more inclined to enter the profession. However, they were more motivated to donate after graduation, especially to their alma maters. Implications for public relations and fundraising curricula are discussed.

Keywords: service-learning, public relations, fundraising, higher education, ROPES

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With more than 100,000 professional fundraisers in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), the field has become a popular career for many individuals (Shaker & Nathan, 2017). However, rarely do two fundraisers take the same path to the profession (Farwell et al., 2020). With no undergraduate degree programs designed specifically for fundraisers[1] , these professionals enter fundraising with training in various industries—such as business, marketing, communication, and nonprofit management—and learn their profession on the job (Farwell et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2016). Although fundraising professionals hold positions across the nonprofit sector, higher education fundraising has developed more rapidly toward professionalization with norms, standards, and practices for its professionals (Skinner, 2019). Thus, higher education fundraising is a fitting place to start a study of educational training for the profession.

While the practice of fundraising has no clear academic home, public relations has laid claim to the theoretical development of fundraising (Mack et al., 2016). Because fundraising is based primarily on the practice of relationship building, the public relations paradigm of relationship management is a natural theoretical and practical fit (Kelly, 1991). Emphasizing the two-way symmetrical communication model of public relations, the ideal of fundraising practice relies upon ethical, mutually beneficial communication between donors and nonprofit organizations. Thus, fundraising is an important aspect in the study and education of public relations scholars and practitioners (Mack et al., 2016).

If fundraising is best informed by public relations and it has yet to be established in undergraduate education, can public relations curricula help to create better-prepared and better-informed future fundraisers? The

1 As of early 2021, the closest existing program to an undergraduate degree in fundraising in the U.S. would be the Bachelor of Arts in Philanthropic Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI, 2021).

current study seeks to examine the ways that public relations education may have an impact on the educational pathways students have to enter the profession of fundraising. While many fundraisers say they “fell into” the profession after earning their college degrees (Farwell et al., 2020, service-learning projects that expose students to fundraising tasks at nonprofits may be a way to bolster fundraising education. Specifically, this study investigates how a service-learning project for a higher education fundraising team at a major U.S. university may help students understand the profession of fundraising, consider entering the profession, and motivate them to give to their alma maters philanthropically. While the benefits of service-learning in public relations is well-documented (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019; Rothberg et al., 2016), the study seeks to apply what is known about public relations service-learning to the underdeveloped study of fundraising education.

Literature Review

Service-Learning in Public Relations

Often found in upper-level communication courses, service-learning brings together students in the classroom with real-world community clients (Fraustino et al., 2019). The terminology emphasizes how students are engaged in solving actual community issues with the input and help of community members, which often means such projects are nonprofit-based. When practiced successfully, clients and students work together to address actual questions from the practice of communication, which may not be addressed without the student’s involvement.

The benefits of service-learning for teaching public relations to undergraduate students is manifold. Students gain actual experience working with clients and producing materials that reflect real industry questions rather than simulations (Addams et al., 2010; Rothberg et al., 2016). Therefore, students gain practice managing clients and peers, addressing problems creatively, and putting basic communications skills to practice (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Muturi et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Whitmer et al., 2009). Students themselves value the experiences of service learning, especially appreciating the opportunity to hone their writing skills and to manage teamwork toward a client's goal (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999). Working with nonprofit clients can also teach students the merits of being civically engaged and motivate giving back to their communities as professionals (Kim et al., 2021; Whitmer et al., 2009).

Working with nonprofits is a common practice of service learning because these organizations often need the extra capacity to accomplish some of their goals (McCollough, 2019). Student projects may even have an economic impact on the communities in which they serve through these class projects (Fraustino et al., 2019; McCollough, 2019; Rothberg et al., 2016). Students who complete service-learning projects for nonprofit organizations in their community have been motivated to continue their work for the organization beyond the project requirements (Addams et al., 2010). Students who feel motivated to work on the service-learning project tend to rate their experiences in the class more positively (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Kim et al., 2021). Thus, evidence exists that the benefits of service-learning can be mutual: students and local communities benefit from working together on projects addressing real society needs.

Certainly, not every service-learning experience is flawless. Students have reported facing unrealistic expectations from clients or clients' lack of understanding for the curricular knowledge students have before entering a project (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019). Additionally, clients report that instructors are unprepared to manage the relationship between the client and classroom, leading to mismatched expectations (Fraustino et al., 2019). Given that nonprofits already face burdens with external partnerships due to staff capacity (van Dyk & Fourie, 2015), service-learning should be approached as a way to build mutual goals for undergraduate education and nonprofit community development (McCollough, 2019; Kim et al., 2021).

Service-Learning for Fundraising Education

Because service-learning so often incorporates clients from nonprofit organizations (Fraustino et al., 2019), applying the practice of service-learning to fundraising education is a natural fit. Because many fundraisers reported learning their professions “on the job” (Farwell et al., 2019), having students participate in fundraising-related service-learning projects may be one way to help prepare future fundraisers while they are still in the classroom. For example, assignments created for a university’s fundraising team by students in a business writing class showed similarly positive results to those in public relations courses. Students wrote a fundraising letter for their dean’s review, and the most impressive letters were implemented in an upcoming solicitation (Addams et al., 2010). Students in that class reported being motivated above and beyond earning a good grade. They wanted to perform well for the dean (the client) and to have their letter chosen for implementation. Like results reported from public relations service-learning (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Whitmer et al., 2009), students reported retaining and understanding writing skills more readily and had more positive reactions to the project when performing for a client (Addams et al., 2010).

Because fundraising is a specialization of public relations (Kelly, 1991), it follows that fundraising-based projects or project components would fit well into service-learning in public relations courses. In an investigation of service-learning business impact, students helped a local community nonprofit raise $16,000 during the semester (McCollough, 2019). Although the projects were not solely about fundraising, the goals of the nonprofit—which the students assisted with—were to raise funds to keep it financially healthy. Other projects that directly related to fundraising—such as writing a fundraising letter on behalf of a nonprofit—resulted in actual donations to the nonprofit (Addams et al., 2010). Thus, service-learning projects incorporating fundraising activities are not only helping students learn public relations skills but also potentially preparing them to become future fundraisers.

Nonprofit management courses are also natural places to find instruction and service-learning projects related to fundraising. Grant-writing is one such skill that has been incorporated into nonprofit management courses and greatly benefits from service-learning applications (Falk, 2011). Other nonprofit programs have specific grant-writing courses that use service-learning as the basis of the entire course specifically because "service-learning" implies a mutual benefit to the nonprofit and to the student (Cuyler, 2017). This study, however, seeks to understand how fundraising-related service-learning projects can be incorporated into a public relations curriculum. Based upon the theory development in public relations which argues that fundraising is best informed by public relations theory (Kelly, 1991, 1998), this study seeks to further demonstrate the alignment between the fundraising practice and public relations education. It further builds upon the argument by Mack and colleagues (2016) that the educational home of fundraising should be in public relations due to its focus on relationship management. Furthermore, public relations education is beginning to incorporate the concept of stewardship into its practice by following the ROPES – research, objectives, programming, evaluation, and stewardship-- (Kelly, 2001) model of public relations campaigns (McCollough, 2019). The value of stewardship in public relations campaigns has been documented in research (e.g., Worley & Little, 2002) and in studies of service-learning projects (e.g., McCollough, 2019). For example, one criticism of service-learning is the lack of impact after the semester ends (McCollough, 2019). However, stewardship—a concept borrowed from fundraising—allows organizations and publics to keep communicating after a project is over

(Kelly, 2001; Worley & Little, 2002). Implementing this final step may enable the service-learning campaigns to have a long-lasting impact that ultimately is the desired outcome of such collaborations (McCollough, 2019). Thus, this study situates fundraising as of particular importance to public relations education, particularly in the setting of service-learning which aims to purposefully benefit students' communities.

Service-Learning Public Relations for Professional Fundraising Client

The current study examines the outcomes of a public relations campaigns course that partnered with a university fundraising team for a service-learning project. Specifically, the university team had great success with a small-donor challenge for food insecurity on campus and was looking for insights on next steps from the perspective of young donors. This project was targeted by the client because of recent trends in declining university donations and shifting philanthropic motivations from alumni donors (Root et al., 2017). Thus, the students in the class were tackling real-world questions for a client while simultaneously learning about the profession of fundraising. The project fits the definition of service-learning which emphasizes civic engagement (Fraustino et al., 2019) by helping students engage with their alma maters and reflect upon their motivations for giving back to this nonprofit institution in the future.

The class at the focus of this paper was one section of an upper-level public relations campaign course taught by one instructor to senior-level students. The curriculum began by teaching students about fundraising communication, the donor cycle of giving (e.g., Worth, 2002), and stewardship (Kelly, 1998) and by providing readings to introduce these concepts during the first few weeks of class. The client included representatives from the university fundraising team, and they joined one class session to present their requested tasks to the class and to share fundraising data from the university framing the success of the original football-game-related challenge campaign. Students were asked by the client to design a follow-up communication campaign that would further engage donors who initially gave to the first giving challenge. Thus, the students were tasked by the client with the goal of creating and building ongoing relationships with these donors, which is articulated as teh foundation of stewardship communication, rather than a singular fundraising event (Kelly, 1998). To execute this directive, students then followed the ROPES model and created a full campaign plan and deliverables for the client by the end of the semester. The 15-person class was split into four groups, each designing a campaign for a different audience of interest to the client: young alumni, athletics-only donors, parents, and current students. The actual campaign was not implemented druing the semester, but the projects - including specific tactics and evaluation plans - were presented and delivered to the client at the end. This course syllabus closely matched syllabi from other sections of the same course taught by one different instructor. These other sections were partnering with other clients who were not university- or fundraising-based, and students did not know the client for each section prior to the start of the semester.

Given the lack of preparation for future fundraisers in traditional college degree programs (Farwell et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2016), this study seeks to understand how pairing a service-learning public relations class with a problem from fundraising-focused client may provide students with a basic knowledge of this potential career.

RQ1: How will student perceptions of the fundraising profession change over the course of a semester working on a fundraising-focused service-learning project?

Specifically, the paper examines how this curricular focus impacts future careers and giving behavior of students who are exposed to fundraising in service-learning projects. To help contextualize the insights, this paper uses the other sections of the same class as a comparison to gauge the reactions of the students from the fundraising-focused project. Thus, the study seeks to explore these additional questions to better understand the impact of this curriculum choice:

RQ2: Will students in the fundraising-focused service-learning project be more likely to consider a career in fundraising than students in the other sections?

RQ3: How will students engaged in fundraising-focused service-learning project understand the profession of fundraising in comparison to students in other sections?

Impact of Service-Learning on Giving Behavior

A fundraising-focused project may help motivate philanthropic behavior on the part of the students as well. Millennials and Gen Z individuals have been shown to give less to institutions like higher education and more to problem-specific causes benefiting society, a sharp departure from giving behavior of older generations like Baby Boomers (Root et al., 2017). Fundraisers at higher education institutions specifically have been concerned about the drop in young alumni donations from these generations, fearing that the traditionally strong alumni support for higher education institutions may be disappearing (K. Hedberg & G. Hallett, personal communication, January 29, 2020). Thus, service-learning projects that expose students to the importance and significance of donations to higher education institutions may help to engage and educate this group of donors toward the importance of giving back. Evidence exists that undergraduates who are involved with their alma maters while students are more inclined to give back after graduation (Fleming, 2019; Skari, 2014). Other service-learning studies have been shown to motivate student giving and deeper involvement with their nonprofit clients (e.g., Addams et al., 2010; McCollough, 2019). Thus, if students are immersed in the work of a client who demonstrates the value of giving back to higher education institutions, perhaps students will be more inclined to consider their alma maters as beneficiaries in the future.

RQ4: Will students enrolled in a fundraising-focused service-learning project be more motivated to give back to 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters by the end of the semester?

RQ5: Will these students be more motivated to give back to 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters compared to students working on other service-learning projects?

Methods

Procedure

Students in four sections of an upper-level public relations course described above received surveys at two time points: week 3 of the semester and then during the final week of the semester (week 15). Every student received the same survey, no matter what section they were enrolled in, and were asked to provide the name of their instructor. Responses were split into two groups: the author's section who completed the class for the university fundraising client and the three other sections, all learning from different instructors, but with non-fundraising-based clients. Of the author's section, 11 of 15 students completed the survey at time one, and 7 of 15 students completed the survey at time two. Of the other sections taught by a different instructor, 34 of potential 45 students completed the survey at time one, and 21 of potential 45 students completed the survey at time two. Responses at time one and time two were not linked to protect privacy. The survey was distributed using an anonymous link via Qualtrics software to ensure confidentiality; the methodology used for the survey included mixed methods as both descriptive statistics and qualitative open-ended responses were requested.

Students were emailed a Qualtrics link to the survey questionnaire outside of class per IRB regulations. The author emailed the instructor of the other sections to send the same link to those students in the other classes. Surveys were distributed via email simultaneously to students and the other instructor; students were asked to list their instructor so the researcher could determine what sections the students were enrolled in during analysis. No incentives were given to protect privacy and ensure no undue influence on the author's students.

Measures & Analysis

Questions included Likert scale items as well as open-ended, free responses. Given the small sample sizes of each survey group, inferential statistics cannot be used for analysis due to lack of statistical power. To answer each research question, results were included both quantitative responses and qualitative responses to open-ended questions. The researcher examined the responses abductively, meaning previous theory on service-learning teaching and new evidence from the survey were analyzed together to develop new meaning to answer the research questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Thus, results were coded and recoded until common themes were identified from the responses and then interpreted in answer to the research questions. This approach has been used in previous teaching-related research in public relations (e.g. Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019) and fundraising (e.g., Addams et al., 2010). Relevant measures from the survey include the following.

Interest in learning about nonprofits: Students were asked to rate "What is your level of interest in learning more about the nonprofit sector and career opportunities in nonprofits?" on a 5-point scale from "not at all interested" to "extremely interested." This question was included on both surveys (time one and time two).

Knowledge of public relations and nonprofit industries: Students were asked to "Rate your knowledge of the public relations industry right now" and "Rate your knowledge of the nonprofit industry right now" on a 5-point scale from "not at all knowledgeable" to "extremely knowledgeable." These questions were included on both surveys.

Giving likelihood: Students were asked "How likely are you to donate to a nonprofit in the future?" This question was adjusted slightly in the second survey to read, "How likely are you to give to a nonprofit after this class (class name) is over?" Both questions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale from "extremely unlikely" to "extremely likely."

Free response questions: Students would see a specific set of open-ended questions based on their response to yes/no questions about giving behavior. For example, the question "Have you ever donated money to a nonprofit during your time in college?" would be followed with one to two specific questions depending on the student's response. Questions are further explained in the results section.

Demographics

Demographics were not collected in the survey due to concerns that this information would reveal students' identities to the author who was instructing one of the class sections. The author also had taught students in the other sections of the class in previous semesters. IRB and the author were concerned about the potential loss of confidentiality for respondents by collecting this information in the survey itself. Instead, the college-level data is reported here to present an estimate of the demographic makeup of the survey respondents. All students who participated in the survey were members of the college for which the following statistics are reported. For race, 70% of the students are reported as white only, followed by 10.3% international, 7.2% Hispanic/Latino only, 4.7% African American only, 3% two or more races, 2.7% Asian only, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% American Indian/Alaska Native (University Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research, 2019). For gender, 64.9% of the college identified as female, 35.1% identified as male, and no other genders were tracked.

Results

RQ1: The first research question asked how student perceptions of the fundraising profession will change over the course of a semester working on a fundraising-focused service-learning project. Only responses from the author's section were analyzed (time one N=11, time two N=7). Three of 11 students mentioned an interest in pursuing a career in nonprofits or fundraising when asked why they were a public relations major or what their career goals were at week three of the semester. While two seemed interested in nonprofit work, one was interested but afraid of entering the nonprofit industry: "I'd like to work for a PR agency in New York working with a variety of clients in different areas. I used to want to do PR for a non-profit, but after a poor internship experience, I'm skeptical of that now." One student specifically mentioned an interest in working in "development communications for a nonprofit or hospital."

At the end of the semester, two of the seven students who completed the survey said their goals changed. One in particular addressed a strengthening interest in working in corporate public relations: "As much as I loved talking about nonprofits and fundraising, this class made me realize how much I want to be in corporate PR or an agency." This student's resolve to work in the more stable corporate industry may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on job prospects during the semester. The other five students said their career goals remained the same.

In comparing time one to time two, students showed a slightly increased interest in learning about nonprofit career opportunities, but the increase was statistically nonsignificant, $t(16) = -0.31$, $p = .76$. At time one, the mean (M=3.09) was slightly over the midpoint with one student saying they were "extremely interested," four students indicating they were "moderately interested," and one student indicating they were "not at all interested." In time two, the mean increased slightly to 3.29 with two students indicating they were "extremely interested," three students were "slightly interested," and no students indicating they were not interested at all. Therefore, descriptive statistics and open responses indicate students were anecdotally interested in learning more about nonprofit careers but were not motivated enough to change their career goals after taking a class on fundraising in the nonprofit sector.

RQ2: The second research question asked if students in the fundraising-focused service-learning project will be more likely to consider a career in fundraising than students in the other sections. In looking at the other sections that were not working on fundraising-related service-learning, one student of 34 respondents (time one N=34) mentioned working in nonprofits as their career goal, while two others mentioned possible nonprofit industries (museum curation and historical organizations) as career goals. Additionally, three of 34 students mentioned working in nonprofits as a reason for pursuing the public relations major. One of the respondents said:

> I have a lot of interests. I'd love to work for a music agency, do something with sustainability, work for a nonprofit, etc. I thought PR would be perfect for this because I can go into any one of these fields with this major.

At the end of the semester, 10 of 21 students (time two N=21) said their career goals had changed. None of these respondents mentioned that they wanted to enter the nonprofit world specifically, but four students said they gained a broader understanding of the wide range of jobs available in the public relations field. For example, one student wrote: "I see how widely necessary and broadly defined public relations really is. It's so much more than flashy spirit events and Sean Spicer, and I'm excited to bring public relations tactics to any position I find myself in post-grad."

In comparing time one to time two, students in the non-fundraising service-learning sections showed a slightly decreased interest in learning about nonprofit career opportunities, but the changes were statistically nonsignificant, $t(53) = 0.93$, $p = .36$. At time one, the mean was slightly below the midpoint (*M*=2.91) with five students (14.7%) indicating they were "extremely interested," 12 students (35.3%) were "moderately interested," and six students (14.7%) indicating they were not interested at all. At time two, the mean (*M*=2.57) decreased slightly with three students (14.3%) saying they were "extremely interested," four students (19%) indicating they were "moderately interested." More than half of the respondents (57.1%) said they were "not interested at all" or "slightly interested" (*n*=12). While the decrease in interest in learning about nonprofit careers could be a result of the impact of COVID-19's paralyzing the economy at the second time point, the fundraising-focused section qualitatively saw an increase in interest about nonprofit careers over the same timeframe. Descriptive statistics indicate the fundraising-focused curriculum may have at least softened the impact of the COVID-19 shutdown on students' interests to learn about careers in the nonprofit sector (see Table 1).

Table 1

Comparing students' interest in learning about careers in the nonprofit sector

		N	*M*(SD)	Median
Fundraising-focused class	*Time 1*	11	3.09(1.22)	3 (Moderately interested)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		34	2.91(1.29)	3 (Moderately interested)
Fundraising-focused class	*Time 2*	7	3.29(1.38)	3 (Moderately interested)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	2.57(1.36)	2 (Slightly interested)

RQ3: The third research question asked how students engaged in fundraising-focused service-learning will understand the profession of nonprofit fundraising in comparison to students in other sections. At the start of the semester, all students in the fundraising-focused class

(*N*=11) rated their understanding of the nonprofit sector no higher than "moderately knowledgeable," while 82.4% (*n*=28) of students in the other sections rated their knowledge of the nonprofit sector no higher than "moderately knowledgeable". At the end of the semester, students in the fundraising-focused class rated their knowledge of both public relations ($t(26) = -.79$, $p = .44$) and nonprofits ($t(26) = 3.02$, $p < .01$) higher than those in the other sections, and the difference in knowledge about nonprofits was a statistically significant difference. All students in the fundraising-focused class (*N*=7) rated their knowledge of nonprofits at "moderately knowledgeable" or higher, nearly the opposite of their responses in time one, a statistically significant increase from time one to time two ($t(16) = 4.07$, $p < .01$) (see Table 2). Thus, students in the fundraising-focused class appeared to have greater understanding of the nonprofit sector than those in the other service-learning courses. Their knowledge of the public relations industry was comparable to the other students (see Table 2).

Table 2

Comparing students' knowledge of the public relations and nonprofit industries

		N	*M*(SD)	Median
Public relations industry				
Fundraising-focused class	*Time 1*	11	3.64(0.81)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		34	3.62(0.78)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Fundraising-focused class	*Time 2*	7	4.14(0.69)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	3.90(0.70)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Nonprofit industry				
Fundraising-focused class	*Time 1*	11	2.55(0.69)	3 (Moderately knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		34	2.53(0.99)	2 (Slightly knowledgeable)
Fundraising-focused class	*Time 2*	7	4.00(0.82)	4 (Very knowledgeable)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	2.81(0.93)	3 (Moderately knowledgeable)

RQ4: The fourth research question asked if giving motivation toward 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters would change for students in the fundraising-focused class over the course of the semester. Many of the students in the class had made donations to nonprofits before taking the course (*n*=8), but many of the causes were nonprofits unrelated to higher education. Of those related to the students' institution, two said they gave to the university's student-run philanthropy benefitting childhood cancer, and one gave to a university-led campaign for food insecurity. Only one mentioned the institution by name as a recipient of the donation. All but one student (*n*=10) said they had at least considered giving to a nonprofit during their time in college. Those who did not give money said they donated goods or posted messages on social media to support the cause. At the start of class, most students said they were likely to make a gift to a nonprofit in the future (*M*=5.82, *SD*=1.83). One student said it was "extremely unlikely," but the rest said they were at least "slightly likely" to make a future donation to a nonprofit. Many of them said their decision to make the future gift would depend on whether the nonprofit was "trustworthy" and handled their money honestly (*n*=4) while the majority said they would give to a cause they cared about (*n*=7). Thus, the students enrolled in the fundraising-focused project were already philanthropically inclined, likely due to the strong emphasis on a student-run philanthropy at their university. However, few said they had made a gift to their institution unless it was connected to a cause (e.g., cancer research, food insecurity).

By the end of the semester, two of seven students (28.6%) said they had made a donation to a nonprofit during the course of the semester. One of these students said they gave to two hunger-related nonprofits because of the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives. Of the five who did not, all cited the impact of COVID-19 on their finances or mental health, which prevented them from donating. However, six of seven students (85.7%) said they would give to nonprofits in the future because of their experiences in the fundraising-focused service-learning class. They cited the importance of the work of many nonprofits and a sense of personal duty to give back as reasons for their future donations. One student specified that they would give once financially stable. All students said they would be at least "slightly likely" to give to a nonprofit after the class was over (M=6.00, SD=0.82), but the increase was not statistically significant ($t(16) = 0.25$, $p = .81$). Additionally, five of the seven students (71.4%) said they would give back to their alma maters after graduation because of their experience in the fundraising-focused public relations class. Three said they would give to specific causes at the university (e.g., food insecurity, student-run philanthropy), but others said they would give back generally to the university. Said two respondents: "I see how it's important to give back (to my alma mater)" and "(I would give) to support a place that has had such a big impact on my life and those within the university." Thus, to answer RQ4, evidence exists to show that students were at least similarly or more inclined to give to their alma maters and nonprofits after class concluded, and qualitative evidence shows new intereast in giving to their alma maters.

RQ5: The fifth research question asked if students in fundraising-focused service-learning project would be more motivated to give back to 1) other nonprofits and 2) their alma maters than students in the other sections. Like the fundraising-focused class, students in other classes were philanthropically inclined, with 31 of 34 students (91.2%) saying they had donated to a nonprofit during their time in college. Only one of these students said they gave to the student's university in general, while six said they gave to university-affiliated causes. The other nonprofits mentioned were those combating domestic violence, natural disasters, and cancer or supporting environmental and religious causes. Like the fundraising-focused class, students in the other sections were already philanthropically inclined when they started their public relations service-learning projects.

By the end of the semester, 10 of 21 students (47.6%) in the regular service-learning courses said they had made a gift during the semester. One of these students specified that they gave to COVID-19 relief efforts, while four said they gave to the student-run philanthropy at their university. Six of the students who did not give cited lack of money or COVID-19-related fears that prevented them from making a donation during the semester, similar to the fundraising-focused class section. Fourteen of 21 students (66.7%) said they would donate to a nonprofit in the future based on their experience in the service-learning class. Said one student: "In working with a client that is a local nonprofit, I was able to see what staff and resources can be directly provided by donations." Two other students cited their class projects as eye-opening to the financial needs of local nonprofits and reasons that they would give to nonprofits in the future. Two students who said "no" to the question explained that they will give to nonprofits in the future, but their experience in the class was not a motivation for doing so. Overall, students in the non-fundraising-focused classes said they would be either neutrally or positively inclined to give to a nonprofit after the class was over (M=5.86, SD=1.15). Additionally, only 11 of 21 students (52.4%) said they would consider giving back to their alma maters after graduation based on their experience in the class. One student who replied "yes" to this question said, "I'm not sure this donation would be monetary. I know how much networking resources have helped me and I'm eager to lend similarly [sic] in the future. (The university) doesn't need any more of my money any time soon." Other students said they would give of their experiences at the university as students. Said one, "The institution has done so much for me throughout my years here and I would love to help continue that for future students." Of the 10 who said "no," four students specifically said the course did not influence their decisions about whether to donate to their university in the future. One said an internship with the fundraising office was more motivating than the public relations course; another said that they would only donate to the university to specifically benefit teachers who made an impact on the student's experience.

To answer the fifth research question, students in the fundraising-focused class had higher percentages of those willing to give back to their alma mater and stronger inclination to give to nonprofits in the future. They also specifically stated in open responses that the class helped them see the importance of giving to their university, while the other class did not. See Table 3 for comparisons between classes.

Table 3

Comparing students' motivation to donate to nonprofits and their alma maters after a public relations class

		N	*M*(SD)	*n* (%) who would give
Fundraising-focused class	*Nonprofits**	7	6.00 (0.82)	6 (85.7%)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21	5.86 (1.15)	14 (66.2%)
Fundraising-focused class	*Alma mater*	7		5 (71.4%)
Non-fundraising-focused classes		21		11 (53.4%)

*$t(26) = 0.30$, $p = .77$

Discussion

The current study sought to understand how a public relations campaigns course focused on a fundraising service-learning project could help students better understand the profession of fundraising; more actively consider entering the profession; and be more inclined to donate to their alma maters in the future. Overall, students in the fundraising-focused class seemed to have a stronger understanding of the nonprofit sector and an interest in learning about nonprofit careers but not necessarily more motivation to enter the profession. While both the fundraising-focused and non-fundraising classes were inclined to donate to nonprofits after the class was over, the fundraising-focused class was more motivated to give to their alma maters and cited the class specifically as an influence on future giving behavior. Thus, fundraising-focused service-learning projects may have important instructional impacts for public relations students: teaching them about the profession and encouraging future donation behavior.

Findings from this study support Mack and colleagues' (2016) assertion that fundraising has a home in public relations classrooms. Students in this study indicated they felt just as knowledgeable about the public relations industry no matter what class section they enrolled in. Additionally, students in all sections reported learning more about nonprofits and how they function through their service-learning projects, which is a well-documented result of working on service-learning for public relations (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Kim et al., 2021; Whitmer et al., 2009). The majority of students--no matter their class project--were inclined to give back to nonprofits after the semester ended, reflecting previous work showing how service-learning can motivate student involvement in their communities (Fraustino et al., 2019). However, students in the fundraising-focused service-learning project mentioned how their class specifically motivated them to give back to their alma maters, while students in the other classes said they were inclined to do so based on unrelated factors. This finding reflects observations from previous service-learning studies that show how involvement in service-learning specifically motivates giving back to the class's nonprofit partner (Addams et al., 2010; McCollough, 2019).

The findings showed that students in the fundraising-specific project had a greater interest in learning more about and greater knowledge of the nonprofit sector at the end of class, which is not surprising. On the other hand, for students in the non-fundraising-focused classes, these results provide evidence that public relations service-learning curricula may not strongly impact students' knowledge of the nonprofit industry, even if the class is working with a nonprofit client. Instead, curricula deliberately focused on nonprofit fundraising and the nonprofit sector may provide students with the knowledge necessary to understand the industry and pique their interest in future careers. This commentary is not to say that nonprofit service-learning must focus on fundraising to convey this understanding. Admittedly, a few students in the non-fundraising sections said their partnership with a nonprofit client helped them to see how important donations were to the programming capabilities of nonprofits. Instead, the takeaway here is that fundraising-focused service-learning projects and curricula may provide the nonprofit-focused skills-based learning that is lacking in the current educational structure of future fundraisers (e.g., Farwell et al., 2020; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). The fundraising-focused class learned how to raise funds; in contrast, the traditional service-learning class learned the importance of those funds for nonprofits. Additionally, the results showed that focusing on fundraising-specific public relations projects did not hinder students' ability to learn about the public relations sector. Thus, a fundraising-focused service-learning experience may provide a twofold benefit to students: learning important public relations skills while better understanding the profession of fundraising in the nonprofit sector.

While students in the fundraising-focused class did feel motivated to give back to their alma maters, the motivation was still tied to specific causes that the university supported. The cause of food insecurity was likely cited as a specific example because the university client project focused on this cause. Only a few students said they would give to the university generally, and only two of them came from the fundraising-focused class. Conversely, students explained how they would give to nonprofits with causes they felt "emotionally connected to," including disaster relief, COVID-19 relief, or societal ills like cancer or domestic violence. These insights continue to underscore the concerns of current fundraising practitioners who acknowledge that giving back to one's alma mater is not as routine for Gen Zers and Millennials as it was for other generations (Root et al, 2017). Instead, capturing the attention of future donors may depend upon linking universities with timely, relevant, emotional causes. Additionally, getting students interested in pursuing careers in university fundraising may also depend upon making them feel like they are impacting an important, worthy cause, rather than lining the pockets of an institution that, as one student said, "already has too much of my money."

The impact of COVID-19 on the results of the study is certainly worth exploring here. The first survey (time one) was launched in mid-January 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic was fully understood and before shutdowns had occurred in the United States. By March 2020, the university in this study had moved to fully online instruction, and many students were told to leave campus for their safety. The second survey (time two) was distributed in the wake of this campus shutdown in mid-April 2020. Many students in the service-learning classes were seniors graduating that semester who were contemplating the demoralizing end to their college years. Due to the uncertain nature of the pandemic during those early months, the impact of COVID-19 likely decreased students' career motivations and inclination to give to nonprofits. The shuttered economy also presented pessimistic hopes of finding a job upon graduation. While these caveats could be considered limitations, the findings in this environment may help us to understand how students were affected by the pandemic. While donations nationwide increased during 2020 (Fidelity Charitable, 2020), students were contemplating their lack of job prospects and lack of financial certainty. However, students' overall strong motivation for future giving to nonprofits seen in this study ultimately reflects their positive view on the future and a deep understanding of the importance of philanthropy. The findings show that the fundraising-focused service-learning project may have increased those motivations slightly over those in the other class sections. Perhaps learning about important causes that nonprofits work to address gave students some perspective about their privilege during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus motivated their perspective to be generous to these organizations.

Practical Implications

This study provides more evidence to show how service-learning projects help students engage with their communities and learn important public relations skills (Aldoory & Whitmer, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; McCollough, 2019; Rothberg et al., 2016). Thus, instructors should actively seek out partnerships in their communities to engage students with real-world nonprofit projects and help them learn about the unique nature of working in this field. This study also supports the idea that service-learning projects with nonprofit partners can also be fundraising-focused and still help students gain important public relations skills, backing theory from Mack and colleagues (2016). In focusing a class on nonprofit fundraising, instructors should follow the ROPES model of public relations to teach their students how to execute a fundraising campaign, as suggested by Kelly (2001). This model of public relations campaign instruction may help students learn to incorporate key elements from the fundraising practice like stewardship into future public relations campaigns outside of fundraising (McCullough, 2019). Thus, the benefits of teaching fundraising-focused public relations may also benefit the practice of public relations overall.

Additionally, evidence from this study shows that incorporating a fundraising-specific service-learning project in a public relations course may help address the current lack of fundraising education for future practitioners. Although the class curriculum was not solely focused on fundraising skills or practices, the practice of fundraising can be theoretically linked to public relations (Kelly, 1991, 1998; Mack et al., 2016), and thus future fundraisers could benefit from public relations training and coursework. Instructors should consider advising their students who have an interest in nonprofit or fundraising careers to enroll in public relations campaigns courses to receive some of this skills-based training. Although this certainly does not substitute fundraising- or nonprofit-focused coursework like those in nonprofit management programs, it will help students receive some formal relationship management and communications training so they are not learning "on the job," as is the current model (Farwell et al., 2020; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). Any preparation will be beneficial to the continual formalization of the profession (Skinner, 2019).

For clients such as those in the fundraising industry, partnering with public relations courses can provide specific benefits. Despite the drawbacks documented about service-learning for client outcomes, these relationships can help to add new supporters to the nonprofit's cause, getting an outside perspective on a problem, or having students complete work that staff do not have time for (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Rothberg et al., 2016; Whitmer et al., 2009). Evidence for these impacts were also found in this study, although this study did not examine the client perspective. First of all, partnering with students to plan a future fundraising campaign helped the client to understand giving motivations of future alumni from Gen Z, which was one of the client's motivations for intially workign with the class. Results from this study indicated that only few students would give back to their alma maters generally out of gratitude, partly due to student debt. Instead, higher education fundraisers may want to align fundraising appeals targeted at younger generations with specific causes that the university is addressing like curing diseases, assisting communities with social issues, or recovering from natural disasters. This recommendation follows other recent research on fundraising trends (e.g., Root et al., 2017).

Additionally, having better trained and more interested students available to the fundraising profession will help managers hire more capable and prepared employees. Learning good writing, analysis, and communications skills found in public relations curricula will only help future fundraisers excel in their jobs, based on the skills required in this industry (Mack et al., 2016; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). Therefore, clients may be able to identify future fundraisers by partnering with an upper-level class project.

Limitations & Future Directions

Unfortunately, the unforeseen interruption of the semester due to COVID-19 pandemic likely had an impact on the results of the study. While the implications of the pandemic on the findings were discussed above, another limitation is its potential effect on the response rates for the second survey of the study, launched at the end of the semester after campus had closed. Motivating students to respond to a survey about their future careers and inclinations to donate to nonprofits was difficult during a time when their semesters and future career plans had been interrupted Additionally, longitudinal studies commonly see drop-off in response rates from the first survey to the next (Groves et al., 2009).

Another concern could be that the researcher did not link first and second responses, so no specific changes in attitude could be tracked over the course of the semester. Instead, findings are analyzed in aggregate, but the small sample size allows for some general linking to occur. The researcher chose to not link these responses due to the researcher's personal knowledge of the students taking the survey and the survey requirement that they would need to disclose what section they were enrolled in. An IRB reviewer concurred with this concern.

Given the small sample size in this study, results can only be interpreted using descriptive comparisons and qualitative data, and thus a mixed-methods approach was used. This analysis is not uncommon for studies of service-learning (e.g., Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Fraustino et al., 2019), but future quantitative measures with statistical power can help predict specific outcomes from service-learning experiences. Thus, this paper is meant to start a conversation about the ways to educate future fundraisers more deliberately and to incorporate donor-specific communications campaigns into public relations curricula. The hope is that additional studies will seek to build upon the questions posed here so that public relations scholars can better determine the educational home for fundraising and inspire future leaders in nonprofit communications.

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GIFTS

Research-Evaluate-Create: Developing Multicultural Perspectives and Approaches for Strategic Visual Communication

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Overview of the Assignment, Including the Rationale

This project builds visual and multicultural communication proficiencies in students of public relations. It serves as a final project for a visual communication course that taught visual literacy, ethics, theory, and strategic communication practices including multicultural and global communication—guided by the textbook *Visual Communication Insights and Strategies* (Page & Duffy, 2022). This assignment's main purpose is to inspire PR students to create purposeful and ethical visual communication.

The assignment tasks students to select and research a developing country in order to strategize appropriate visual messaging. In many developing countries, poverty, literacy, environmental issues, and sanitation conditions impact what personal hygiene and health lifestyle products are needed and valued, and how their benefits can or should be communicated. Students also apply the principles of visual rhetoric, semiotics, metaphors, narratives, symbolic fantasies, and/or gestalt design principles (see key terms and definitions in Appendix B) through the creation of a design rough with elements that signify or refer to culturally meaningful ideas and symbols. For their chosen country, this final project activity challenges students to develop culturally relevant brand messaging for a personal hygiene or health lifestyle product that addresses social and

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environmental responsibility.

Student Learning Goals

1) Understand that cultural awareness and intelligence is needed for multicultural PR visual communication with global publics.

2) Diagnose the strategy for appropriate visual communication by researching cultural dimensions and the societal, environmental, and economic profiles of developing countries.

3) Gain insights on how to position and visually communicate socially responsible initiatives, services, and products within developing countries.

4) Demonstrate knowledge of how visual theory can guide pictorial messaging.

5) Confidently simulate a client presentation.

Connection to Public Relations Practice and/or Theory

The global public relations markets expected to grow from $103 billion in 2022 to $149 billion by 2026 (BRC, 2022). This expected growth is due to post-COVID-19 business recovery and adjustments to continued operational challenges. A rising need to gain competitive advantages is driving the PR market and bringing new challenges to PR professionals working for global agencies, MNCs, or NGOs. The strategic communicator must develop an understanding of a foreign market's unique dynamics and cultural characteristics. It is critical for PR students to develop multicultural awareness, knowledge, and sensibilities to build their visual literacy and competencies in this important field.

Research also suggests that MNCs will have a smoother road if they "stress the social role of the organization and . . . emphasize an active but intelligent involvement in changing and improving societal conditions" (de Brooks & Waymer, 2009, p. 31). The Edelman Trust Barometer (2022), conducted with 36,000+ respondents in 28 countries, reports that societal leadership is now a core business function. The other institutions it tracks—government, media, and the nonprofit community—have steadily declined in public trust. It also finds the quality of information is the most powerful trust builder, with trust in business specifically increasing in many developing countries.

The theory of cultural intelligence, defined as the ability to comprehend different beliefs, practices, attitudes, and behaviors in a country or market and apply that knowledge to attain one's goals (Page & Parnell, 2021), guides students, as future global PR practitioners, to learn and adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of the countries where their clients or organizations operate.

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

This final project has been assigned to a 400-level class, Public Relations Visual Communications. Learning outcomes are evidenced through students' initial workshopping their challenges with each other, presenting early stages of their projects to the class for brainstorming, and presenting their final projects for peer engagement, critique, and discussion.

Students have researched the following countries: Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Hungary, Albania, Croatia, Malaysia, Philippines, Fiji, India, Mozambique, Rwanda, Panama, Morocco, and Trinidad & Tobago, providing culturally relevant and socially responsible product ideas and visual messaging. For example, to help Malaysians take part in combating effects of climate change and reduce landfill waste, reusable paper towels carried four culturally relevant designs: star with moon (religion), top-spinners and kick ball (popular traditional games) and rainforests (land characteristics). To address period poverty in Hungary, eco-friendly reusable pads are introduced into a country where heavy taxes are imposed on feminine hygiene products. To combat plastic waste in Albania, a visual message uses pathos and moral appeals to encourage consumers to use biodegradable bamboo toothbrushes.

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Appendix A

ASSIGNMENT

Research-Evaluate-Create: Developing Multicultural Perspectives and Strategies for Public Relations Visual Communications

Instructions: You are a researcher with a strategic communication agency and your client is a hypothetical (not an existing) U.S.-based multinational corporation that manufactures personal hygiene and health products (shampoos, deodorants, lotions, fragrances, feminine products, tissues, drinking water solutions, healthier foods, etc.) that are socially and environmentally responsible. You must research and strategize a PR visual messaging campaign to introduce one of its new products (you must imagine one) to a developing nation. Don't worry about your product being in competition with already existing products – that's not the point. The point is to study a country's culture and embed that culture into your product and the way you visually communicate it.

There are 4 deliverables:

A. Memo to the Account Executive
B. Creative Brief
C. Rough Concept Design
D. Class Presentation with PowerPoint

Step One, RESEARCH

1. Search for the Wikipedia page "Developing Country" and scroll down to find a list of *developing* countries. Choose a country.
2. Then search for the Hofstede Insights "Country Comparison" page and enter your country's name to find its cultural dimension values.
3. For further research, search for "The World Factbook-CIA." Once you select your country, explore the "People and Society" link in the lower left-hand contents bar. Do further research as necessary.

Step Two, EVALUATE

Report your findings to the Account Executive in a Memo. Besides identifying the country and the product, the memo must *specifically reference* your research (Hofstede's cultural dimensions and any additional research) to justify your recommendations for the product and visual messaging. As this is both a professional and academic document, it must include a *minimum of 5* in-text citations and an end reference list. Required length: 350-400 words. *(Instructors: if applicable, require students to also include X number of key terms, highlighted, from their study of visual theory/design concepts See list of Key Terms at end, drawn* *from the Page & Duffy textbook.)*

For your creative team, complete the following **Creative Brief** guided by the country's cultural dimensions and any insights obtained from the World Factbook and any other sources.

Creative Brief

Country:

Summary of its cultural dimensions, noting the most significant:

Product:

The challenge: (Answer: What is the need?)

The solution: (Answer: How and why will you successfully meet the challenge?)

The audience: (Answer: Who will your messaging target?)

The intention: (Answer: What does the audience need to understand/feel?)

The specifics: (Answer: How should the visual message look and function?)

Step Three: CREATE

To help guide the creative team, make a **Rough Concept Design** that follows your brief. It should be either a single frame or a short multiple-frame storyboard.

FINAL PRESENTATION:

Build a PowerPoint presentation directed to your hypothetical client (to be delivered in the classroom or in a voice narrated PPT exported to video). In this presentation, you will summarize your findings, present your creative brief, and display and explain your design rough—noting the visual theory and design principles that guided it. The presentation must fall between *(Instructors: determine online or in person and length parameters considering class size and any time constraints).*

Appendix B

Key Visual Theory Terms *(if required in Memo)*

METAPHOR (Page & Duffy, 2022, pp. 125, 126)
Target – topic of the metaphor
Source – how the metaphor is framed
  (Example: The wind (topic) is a lion (source) today.)
Analogies - similarities
Interactive theory of metaphor - metaphor as an aspect of language (The wind is a lion today)
Conceptual metaphor theory - metaphor based on concepts/thoughts + not words alone (Politics is a game)
Structural metaphor – abstract experience compared to simple experience (Life is a puzzle)
Orientational metaphors – metaphors organized in terms of spatial comparisons (Feeling up today)
Embodiment metaphors - metaphors using experiences of the body (That news is heavy)
Conduit metaphor - metaphors in which ideas are objects, expressions are containers for those objects, and communication is the sending of those containers (her feelings came through)

Synecdoche - use of a physical part of something to stand for the whole, or less commonly, the use of the whole to stand for a part

Metonym - uses a close association with a concept—and not a physical part of it

Personification - a physical object or entity is referred to or presented as a person, thereby suggesting human motivations, characteristics, and activities

Irony - a deliberate metaphorical expression that signifies an oppositional meaning—often implying sarcasm or seen as insulting. 2 types:

> **Hyperbole** – extreme exaggeration, often unrealistic or literally unbelievable, serving to emphasize an implied meaning
>
> **Litotes -** uses diminishment and negativity to gain positive attention toward something

Adjacent images - both target and source are present in some proximity to each other

Unified images - blends target and source into a single image

Implied images - compares two things that are not alike without showing one of those things

NARRATIVE (Page & Duffy, 2022, p. 153)

Narrative rationality - a capacity that humans inherently possess, allowing them to tell good from bad stories, moral from immoral stories, and acceptable from unacceptable stories

Narrative probability - the story's logical coherence

Narrative fidelity – the story's truthfulness

Form – *how* content is presented in spatial and temporal juxtapositions, and color and lighting

Content - *what* a story says through characters, actions, and settings

Myths - recurring stories containing beliefs and values that are significant, long lasting, and widely accepted as being true within a culture

Idealistic/moralistic myth - one of brotherhood, valuing human equality, tolerance, charity, trustworthiness, community celebration, love, justice, and compassion

Materialistic myth - one of individual success, valuing entitlement, individualism, heroic achievement, persistence, initiative, self-reliance, pleasure, the entrepreneurial spirit, and success

Master analogue - a story's deep structure myth, whether idealistic/ moralistic or materialistic

Archetype - original pattern; the basic building blocks of stories found in characters, situations, and symbols

Visual syntax - form (see definition of form)

Tropes - commonly recurring motifs in creative works

SEMIOTICS (Page & Duffy, 2022, p. 98)

Ideology – body of beliefs and representations promote the values and interests of dominant groups within society

Gestalt - meaning suggested by grouping elements to make sense of the whole

Signifier - the visual image itself

Signified - the meaning suggested by the visual image

Denotation - direct, specific, literal meaning

Connotation - meaning that is subjective, depended on interpretation/ cultural knowledge

Icon - sign that conveys similarities to the object

Index - a sign that appears to have a factual connection with a missing object

Symbol - sign that associates with knowledge drawn from interpretation, and not through perceptions of similarity or factual connections

SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY (Page & Duffy, 2022, p.184)

Fantasies - imaginative ideas with symbolic meanings

Fantasy Themes - shared imaginative ideas with symbolic meanings

Fantasy Type - a recurring fantasy theme

Convergence - sharing of the same emotions and embracing the same values

Rhetorical vision - a group consciousness; a collective, overall understanding; a worldview

Dramatis Personae - characters in real life, in a play, a movie, or any mediated product

Scene - physical or symbolic location (setting) of the action

Plotline - underlying reason for the actions taken, or the conflicts faced, by the major characters

Symbolic Cue - shorthand saying or image–recognized by participants–that stands for a more complete fantasy theme

Saga - oft-repeated telling of the achievements in the life of a person, group, community, organization, or nation

Chaining - when a story catches the attention of people in a group, they build on its meaning through their communication

Sanctioning Agent - bottom-line value that justifies the drama and legitimizes the rhetorical vision, or the course of action people take.

VISUAL RHETORIC (Page & Duffy, 2022, p.70)

Rhetoric - use of symbols in communication that's crafted to modify the perspective of the receiver

Ethos - trustworthiness, credibility

Logos - use of reasoning

Pathos - force or feelings

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GIFTS

Crisis Exchange Program

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ABSTRACT

Crisis communication is a fast-growing field in industry and scholarship. This teaching brief incorporates Benoit's image repair and Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Two crisis case studies are presented to two different public relations classes by two different professors at two different institutions. The first case study is presented toward the beginning of the semester, and the second case study is presented at the end of the semester, after students have learned theory and strategy. Once the crisis is presented in each class, students have 45 minutes to develop a news release, a 60-90 second spokesperson video, and a social media post in response to the crisis, as a simulation of what would occur at an organization facing a crisis. Then, the responses from the colleges are shared with one another, providing an opportunity for competition, critique, and objective feedback.

Keywords: Image repair theory, situational crisis communication theory, crisis communication

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Brian Solis (2013) tweeted, “we live in a time where brands are people and people are brands.” Reputation management, including crisis management, is an ongoing process as crises are expected and often unpredictable (Coombs, 2014). Due to this, as educators it is our responsibility to prepare students to maintain brands with strategic, theory-grounded responses to crises of all types within various organizations. This simulation involves two crisis case studies that actually occurred being presented to two separate public relations classes by two different professors at two different institutions. The cases should represent differing crisis typologies and affect one nonprofit organization and one for-profit organization. This way, students gain experience responding to unique crises on behalf of various organizations.

Once the case study is presented, each class uses the remaining class time, about 45 minutes, to complete a news release, a 60-90 second spokesperson video, and a social media post in response to the crisis. Competing with another institution incentivizes students to present their best work and encourages peer feedback, which studies show enhances educational relationships, fosters deeper learning, and develops students’ critical thinking skills. The professors together decide which class’s response might be more effective for each crisis to declare a winning team. Additionally, the Spider Web pedagogical method challenges students to collaborate with one another. This discussion method involves students sitting in a circle to problem solve within a group, while the instructor sits outside of the circle and records the discussion pattern, which often takes on the appearance of a spiderweb (Wiggins, 2010). Additionally, the instructor notes the nature and significance of students’ conversational contributions. Students become less concerned about interacting with the instructor to seek approval and more focused on working together to problem solve with this method. We also found that students are better able to criticize the work of their peers with whom they have no personal connection than peers in the same class. Therefore, this teaching brief explains the process of the crisis exchange program, student learning goals, theories foundational to this project, and ways in which to assess the student learning goals.

Step 1: Selecting the Case Studies

To ensure the crisis exchange program best meets the student learning goals, selecting appropriate crises for analysis is paramount. The first case study is presented to students toward the beginning of the semester, before they have learned the value of a crisis management plan, crisis communication theory, or strategy. As such, we select a simple, straight-forward case study involving a human error made by a nonprofit organization. We present this case study to each of our classes on the same day, so the sharing of responses and feedback is timely. Students feel the pressure of time that would exist in such a scenario. They first discuss their possible responses amongst the class and then quickly divide into smaller teams—one to write a news release, one to write a social media post, and one to record a 60-90 second video response. Students must email the professor their responses so they may be shared with the other professor after class.

The second case study (Appendix A) is presented to students toward the end of the semester, after students have learned how to develop a crisis management plan, crisis communication theory and strategy. We select a challenging case study that is difficult to classify. This incident occurs at a for-profit organization, and students take their time to strategize before breaking into smaller teams to develop the response. Students are encouraged to serve on a different team (video, news release, or social media post) than they selected in the first case study so they may gain practice with a second response type. Toward the end of class, students compare their news release, video response, and social media post for accuracy and consistency. While the students discuss the crisis, we record the discussion using the Spider Web model. We use this record to provide detailed feedback on the contributions of each crisis communication team member (students).

Step 2: Critiquing the Responses

Once the responses are collected and shared with the other professor, the next class meeting is used to critique the crisis responses. During the first crisis case study, students are often distracted by outfits worn by the other team or unique contextual features shown in the video. However, they also enjoy critiquing other students' work and uncovering important conclusions. These conclusions are summarized and shared with each of the two classes. We then show students how the organization responded, which helps them to critique their own work.

After the second case study, students are eager to show their best work to another class and professor, and eager to strategically critique the other team. Students apply theory, strategy, and textbook language to identify areas of concern from rhetoric to video details and even social media contextual factors. Similar to the first case study, students are then exposed to the way in which the organization responded to the crisis, which again helps them to critique their own work more thoroughly.

Step 3: Personal Reflection

After these class meetings, students complete a self-evaluation form (Appendix C) questioning their individual contributions and teamwork throughout the crisis response and critique process. Feedback is given to the students based on the record of spider web discussions. We record how students interacted and the nature of their contributions to the conversations. The self-evaluation form also challenges students to summarize what they learn through the crisis exchange program. This final step is especially important as they articulate the challenge of crisis response, the quality of their responses or critiques, or even lessons learned about teamwork.

Student Learning Goals

To best implement the crisis exchange program, student learning goals must be considered. This teaching brief is designed to meet four student learning goals. First, students will synthesize and evaluate a complex crisis scenario. Presenting students with two different crises at two types of organizations challenges them to incorporate textbook concepts with examples from the professional world.

Secondly, students will exhibit an understanding of professional strategies used in crisis communication. Since students work to develop a crisis response, they demonstrate their writing, video, and social media prowess. Thirdly, students will apply crisis theories and strategies in a simulated activity. For the second case study, we provided students with a worksheet outlining Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Benoit's Image Repair Theory. This way, they use the language of theory to best articulate the crisis and ensure the responses fit the crisis typology and attribution level.

Finally, students will collaborate to develop a professional crisis response and provide critical feedback to students at another institution. Through the critique of their own work, work from another college, messages from the organization, and self-evaluation, students work together to critically analyze professional crisis responses.

Connection to Public Relations Practice and Theory

The crisis exchange program is underpinned by Benoit's Image Repair (1997) and Coombs's (2014) Situational Crisis Communication (SCCT) theories. Heider's Attribution Theory is briefly discussed, but only within the context of SCCT. Regarding SCCT, Coombs asserts that to best respond to a crisis, the crisis type, history of the crisis, and the reputation of an organization must be considered. Once these elements of Coombs's SCCT are discussed, the classes are required to consider Benoit's Image Repair postures to develop their response content and tone.

During the critique process, students are challenged to uncover the image repair strategy used by the other class and the organization. They also revisit their own crisis response to discern whether their posture is the best strategy for clear and effective crisis communication.

Evidence of Learning Assessment

At the core of designing the crisis exchange program is student learning goals and ways in which we may evidence their learning. The student learning assessment for this project is four-fold. First, pertaining to students evaluating a complex crisis, the professors employ the Spider Web discussion model, as described by Alexis Wiggins (2010), to document students' contributions to discussions. Students may use the textbook and crisis response strategy worksheet (See Appendix B) to guide their conversational input.

Next, students' understanding of professional crisis strategies is assessed through students' completing a reflective self-evaluation and nature of contributions made to the Spider Web discussion. Students' abilities to apply crisis communication theories is assessed by evaluating the news release, social media post, and video response of the other class to analyze their response and provide feedback to those students. Feedback from the Spider Web discussion is also considered.

Finally, students are required to develop a crisis response and provide a critique of a crisis response. This goal is assessed through the self-evaluation and level of critical analysis made about both college classes and the organization's responses to the crises. Not only is this program engaging for students, but they learn and apply crisis communication theory to simulated crises.

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Appendix A: Sample Case Study

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Pepsi steadily gained on Coke in terms of market share. In the early 1990s, people loved Pepsi because it was sweeter than Coke. Pepsi was known for its aggressive, savvy marketing. In 1992, Pepsi launched "Crystal Pepsi," a clear cola that put fans into a craze. Everyone wanted to try clear soda!

Thursday, June 10: An elderly couple in Tacoma, Washington, purchased a can of Diet Pepsi one evening. The next morning, they called their lawyer to report a syringe was found inside of the Diet Pepsi can. The attorney called the press and local health officials, who then notified the police.

Friday, June 11: A woman in Federal Way, Washington—10 miles away from Tacoma—reported finding a syringe in her can of Diet Pepsi.

Appendix B: Theory-Grounded Worksheet

In Coombs' (2014) *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing and responding*, he includes three tables that help to guide students with the crisis exchange program. Each of these tables is below described throughout the worksheet.

Crisis Response Strategy

Step 1: Categorize the nature of the crisis.

Circle one: Paracrisis, Crisis, Disaster

Circle one of the below crisis types:

Table 1: Types of crises by level of responsibility. This table lists crises in order of low to high levels of attribution and organizational responsibility.

Step 2: What is the history of the crisis? What is the prior reputation of the organization?

Step 3: Determine which response strategy best fits the type of crisis and possible liability of that response.

Circle the strategy(s) that should be considered:

Table 2: Crisis response strategies according to the liability and the most appropriate situation for each response strategy.

Step 4: Develop an objective where you consider the ultimate goal of all crisis communication efforts.

Examples: There are 8 types of objectives from "media coverage favorability" to "word of mouth" that are listed by Coombs (2014).

Step 5: Consider the form of your crisis response. (News release, 60-90 sec. spokesperson video, social media post).

Spokesperson(s):

Mediums:

Target audience:

Step 6: Develop strategic messages that meet the crisis communication objective. Use the table below to guide you with executing one of the repair postures.

Table 3: Image repair postures. Each posture, along with a definition, is included.

Now that you've completed steps 1-6, develop your crisis response.

Step 7: Develop a follow-up plan. After distributing your initial crisis response message(s), how might you follow up with stakeholders? Consider both victims and non victims. Revisit your objective. How would you gather information to discern whether you met the objective?

Appendix C: Reflective Self-Evaluation

Crisis Exchange Program Self Evaluation

Name: ____________

1. On which team did you participate?

Circle one: News Release Social Media Spokesperson

2. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being you were present but didn't significantly contribute, and 5 being leading the team or offering the most significant contributions), how well did you perform as a CCT member on Wednesday?

Circle one: 1 2 3 4 5

Comments about your contribution(s):

3. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being you were present but didn't significantly contribute, and 5 being leading the team or offering the most significant contributions), how much did you contribute to the analysis of Carthage College's response?

Circle one: 1 2 3 4 5

Comments about your contribution(s):

4. Who in your team (including yourself) would you like to nominate as the most valuable CCT/CMT member? Explain.

5. Reflecting on the crisis strategy response worksheet, which step did you find most challenging? Explain.

6. What did you learn from this project? Write one paragraph connecting textbook concepts with your experience.

Appendix D: Examples of Student Work

NEWS RELEASE (College of the Ozarks)
Harrison, NY – Over the last twenty-four hours foreign objects have been reported in PepsiCo (Pepsi) products in numerous states. In response, Pepsi has launched an independent investigation into these claims across all facilities.

For decades Pepsi has delivered high quality products to its consumers, and Pepsi holds itself to high standards of quality and safety.

Above all, we value our customers. These standards are in place to ensure that our valued customers each receive a consistent experience.

Moving forward, Pepsi will remain committed to all stakeholders and to exceeding expectations. We are still safe. We are still committed to quality. We are still caring for our customers. We are still Pepsi.

NEW RELEASE (Carthage College)

Indianapolis, IN – After a recent finding of a needle in a PepsiCo product, the company is taking every step available to find the cause of this hazard. “It has come to our attention that a needle was found in one of our PepsiCo products. We are just as horrified as the customer was by this finding, and we apologize for the distress this caused to the loyal customer who was affected by this,” says a PepsiCo spokesperson. “To prevent this hazard from happening to any of our other loyal customers, PepsiCo is temporarily recalling this product from shelves until we have found the cause of this unprecedented issue.”

In addition to temporarily recalling their products, PepsiCo is offering a free Crystal Pepsi to any customer who sends a receipt of a Pepsi beverage to the company (terms and conditions apply). Additionally, to encourage transparency, the company is welcoming any and all stakeholders to come to the factory and view its cleaning procedures and is having all machinery and equipment inspected by an outside company to ensure safety. “We are excited to use this opportunity to review all aspects of our factory and machinery and to continue to guarantee 100% our customers’ safety.”

SOCIAL MEDIA POST (College of the Ozarks)

Twitter. “In response to the allegations of compromised Pepsi cans, we have decided to hire an outside investigator to ensure the quality of our product. Thank you to our loyal customers who continue to believe in us. We are still safe. We are still committed to quality. We are still caring for our customers. We are still Pepsi. #stillPepsi” *link to video release

SOCIAL MEDIA POST (Carthage College)

Twitter. “We are disturbed and stunned by yesterday’s news. Many have expressed their thoughts and concerns to use about the situation. We are sorry this happened and are doing everything we can to get to the bottom of the situation. If you would like to bring in your receipt in showing proof of purchase within the past two weeks, we are willing to exchange your Pepsi Cola for one free Crystal Clear Pepsi drink."

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GIFTS

"PR in Real Time": A Problem-Based Approach to Generating Engagement and Learning

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Rationale

"PR in Real Time" is a weekly, problem-based learning activity that provides an opportunity for students to utilize critical thinking skills as they apply course concepts to real-world challenges throughout the semester. The activity promotes student engagement at the outset of class, fosters community in the classroom, draws attention to current events and reliable resources for industry news, and connects course material to tangible, everyday examples. It has been used successfully in an introductory Public Relations Principles course for both in-person instruction and synchronous online delivery.

The activity draws upon AEJMC teaching monographs regarding the use of real-life problems in the PR classroom (Fischer, 1997) and problem-based learning research literature, which articulates a focus on teaching basic competencies of a subject within the framework of authentic scenarios (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Norman & Schmidt, 2000). It also incorporates elements of the Think-Pair-Share instructional technique (Lyman, 1981).

"PR in Real Time" begins with the instructor presenting a current public relations issue taken from a news outlet or an industry blog. After providing background information on the issue, the instructor poses three to four strategic questions. Examples of potential questions include the

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following: Which stakeholders does this issue affect? Are there any ethical considerations that need to be considered in this situation? Which PR theories might apply in this scenario? Regardless of the issue, each activity includes a final question that asks students how they would manage the situation.

Students have a moment to consider the day's discussion questions before exchanging their responses in small peer groups. This initial small-group environment offers a more comfortable discussion space, which has been shown to generate more and better discussion in a larger setting (Barkley et al., 2014). Students are asked to work with the students sitting around them. Typically, students tend to sit in the same seats throughout the semester even without formal seating assignments. Therefore, a natural byproduct of "PR in Real Time" is that it fosters relationships within the classroom.

Following the small-group interactions, students report back on their conversations during a collective discussion of the day's questions. Responses are cataloged on the white board in an effort to affirm student contributions and to provide a visual reminder of the many considerations and potential solutions PR practitioners navigate when addressing an issue. The discussion concludes with the instructor providing takeaways from industry sources, course materials, and their own expertise. There is often overlap between the class responses and these predetermined takeaways, which provides an added opportunity to highlight student success.

Careful consideration is given to topic selection throughout the semester in order to incorporate a range of industries (nonprofit, corporate, agency), professional interest areas (crisis communication, employee communication, travel and tourism), and identities (among leaders, employees, and stakeholders). As students become accustomed to the types of subjects that work well for the activity, they are invited to submit their own topic ideas using a Google Form. This helps to further engage students in the learning process, to tap into their respective areas of interest, and to diversify course content.

Student Learning Goals

- Apply foundational public relations concepts to real-world situations
- Identify the relevant stakeholders involved in everyday public relations issues
- Evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of various responses to public relations issues
- Formulate strategic solutions to open-ended problems
- Articulate and support a chosen solution among peers using oral communication

Connection to Public Relations Practice

This activity centers on current events that have a substantial public relations focus. Weekly topic selection allows for consideration of a variety of applicable PR concepts throughout the course of a semester. Meanwhile, the questions asked of students during the exercise and the takeaways provided at the conclusion of the activity allow the instructor to highlight relevant subject matter being taught in the course. While crisis communication scenarios tend to be a reliable source of student engagement, it is important to provide students with exposure to a broad range of PR responsibilities.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

"PR in Real Time" provides perhaps the clearest evidence of student learning over the course of a semester. As the semester progresses, these weekly discussions become more nuanced and increasingly incorporate relevant public relations concepts. Meanwhile, students who have completed the course often mention "PR in Real Time" as their favorite activity and reference specific discussions they enjoyed.

Teaching observations have further supported the value of "PR in

Real Time" for student learning. A senior colleague described the activity and its outcomes in the following manner during a peer evaluation of my teaching in a synchronous online course:

Using Zoom's poll function, Dr. Taylor got the class involved in a discussion of how Gorilla Glue could use the PR principles they'd been learning to respond. Should they respond at all, he asked (45% said yes, 55% said no). Moving on to legal and moral implications, Dr. Taylor let students propose options, including philanthropy (helping her with medical bills and using that fact in their ads), updating the existing warning label, issuing a "holding statement," using social media, and others. Given that it is still only the third week of the semester, the students' knowledge, and their ability to apply what they'd learned, were impressive.

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Appendix

Example of Activity

"PR in Real Time": Fake Phishing Email

Background

First, students are provided with background information about the story using an Associated Press news story. Screenshots of the story are shared in a Google Slides presentation that is projected at the front of the classroom.

The Associated Press (Associated Press, 2022) reports the following:

> "Officials at Oregon Health & Science University have apologized to employees after a fake phishing test drew complaints about raising false hopes.
>
> The university sent the phishing test email to employees on April 12 offering up to $7,500 in financial assistance, Portland television station KGW (8) reported Thursday.

The email, from a ‘benefit@ohsu.edu’ address, read in part: ‘In response to the current community hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon Health & Science University has decided to assist all employees in getting through these difficult times.’ It included a link where respondents could ‘register’ for COVID-related benefits.

But the offer was not real — it was a test intended to measure employees’ cybersecurity awareness and OHSU’s own technology systems. The test was sent several days after the university sent a message to employees warning them about suspicious emails. The phishing test was met with frustration from some employees.”

Public Response

Next, students are shown a rundown of national headlines the story generated and a selection of social media posts that illustrate the magnitude of the issue and the negative attention it attracted. Again, screenshots of these items are projected at the front of the classroom. An example of a Twitter response is as follows: “my university sent an email about providing $7,500 in assistance to those experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic....turns out it was a PHISHING exercise... is this a joke???” (Luong, 2022).

Discussion

Having the necessary background context, students are now asked to consider a series of questions about this issue that are projected at the front of the classroom so they have them as a guide. Students are provided a moment for personal reflection before meeting in small groups to discuss their answers.

Questions to Consider:

- What is your emotional reaction to this situation?
- What would you want your employer to say or do in response to this?
- Which area(s) of public relations are most relevant to this situation?
- Which stakeholders should we consider as we plan our response?

Following the small-group discussions, the class reviews each question collectively. Student responses are written on the white board by the instructor throughout this discussion.

Takeaways

The activity concludes with the instructor providing outcomes and takeaways. These include the following:

- The organization's statement: "This week, as part of OHSU's regular exercises to help members practice spotting suspicious emails, the language in the test email was taken verbatim from the actual phishing email to ensure no one else fell for the scam. That was a mistake. The real scam was insensitive and exploitative of OHSU members - and the attempt to educate members felt the same way, causing confusion and concern. We sincerely apologize to the OHSU community."
- Analysis from "The Daily Scoop" blog: "OHSU's response includes a direct apology to the community affected by the exercise and validates the emotional response of many critics. However, the university did not address the issue on social media, where much of the backlash is still lingering. It's a good reminder to meet your audience where they are, especially in times of comms crisis."

- The professor's takeaways:
  - The importance of internal communication
  - Internal communication can quickly become external communication
  - Integrated communication: work together with other departments in an organization
- Takeaways from the textbook:
  - "Evaluating Employee Communication:
  Measure and evaluate how communication reaches internal publics, as you would with any PR campaign. Consider your messaging outputs, outtakes, and outcomes.
    - Was it well timed?
    - Was the content truthful and accurate?
    - Did it have relevance for the specific receivers?
    - Was it accessed and read or reviewed?
    - Did it result in its objectives (inform, shape opinion, or encourage behavior)?" (Page and Parnell, 2017, p. 258).

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GIFTS

Podcasting PR's Role in Social Movements

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Overview: From the Suffrage Movement to #MeToo, and from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter, public relations has played a major role advancing social movements throughout history. In this scaffolded assignment, students in an asynchronous online PR & Social Movements honors course created podcasts about the role of public relations in social movements. Through a series of group assignments, students research key communicators of the movement, craft a script, record a podcast, and design cover art. Once complete, they share their work more broadly by creating an abstract and poster to present with their podcast at student research day.

Through independent research, students identify ways that strategic communication has been used to persuade, motivate, and change attitudes in an effort to advance social movements and activist causes. The Suffrage Movement was the primary movement used when this assignment was initially deployed; however, it can be used to cover a variety of social movements and is replicable across a variety of levels and types of public relations courses.

As professors seek out ways to incorporate topics of diversity, equity and inclusion into their public relations courses, this assignment provides a way to add a range of diverse voices to the discussion. As The

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Commission on Public Relations Education's *Report on Undergraduate Education, Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners* (2018) notes, diversity and inclusion is a key area of emphasis and recommended that educators "commit to integrating D&I focused topics and discussions in the curriculum" (p. 139).

Additionally, as many professors continue to teach online courses, and while "students in online courses can feel a strong sense of isolation and lack of inclusivity" (Guertin, 2010), this assignment attempts to combat that by providing an opportunity to connect with peers and build community. Lee (2008) and colleagues note that collaborative development of podcasts enables "student conceptualisations of disciplinary content to be shared with peers," and "is a powerful way of stimulating both individual and collective learning" (p. 501).

Given the rise of podcasting as a broadcast medium and its ability to engage broader audiences, it is a valuable tool for scholarship (Singer, 2019) as well as public relations practitioners. This assignment presents a more "creative" use of podcasting in the classroom, according to Heilesen (2010), who noted that "creative use generally means assigning students to communicate by means of podcasts their understanding of a particular topic" (p. 1066). This is in contrast to the professor creating podcasts to deliver course content to students.

Finally, this assignment provides professors and students with an opportunity to share their work, and the stories of lesser-known activist communicators, outside of the classroom. Through participation in Student Research Day, students shared their research and findings via posters accompanied by iPads so participants can listen to the podcasts while reviewing the poster. There is also the possibility to partner with campus media outlets to further disseminate the student-created podcast content.

Student Learning Goals:

- Understand the role of strategic communication in social movements.
- Understand the importance of communicating for a specific audience with an objective in mind.
- Identify examples of public relations strategies and tactics in social movements, politics, and/or corporate public relations campaigns.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes:

(A small sample of responses notably from non-majors as this was taught in an honors core course.)

- *"I definitely learned a lot more about Elizabeth Cady Stanton and how she used PR tactics. My favorite part was doing the research about her."*
- *"I liked working with a group and this was an assignment unlike any that I've had so it was fun and different."*

Connection to Public Relations Practice/Theory:

In the early 2000s, scholars like Dozier and Lauzen (2000), Smith and Ferguson (2001), and Berger (2005) called for more scholarship related to social activism. In addition, Miller (2000) called on scholars to examine "civic, voluntary, and religious groups; labor unions, consumer groups, and trade associations; women's and minority groups; small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and political groups" (p. 414).

Twenty years later, as research and pedagogy related to the role of public relations, social activism and social movements have grown, the emphasis in textbooks still often remains on public relations in a corporate context.

Given the increased attention to social movements in the 21st century, as well as renewed student interest in participating in activism, this assignment provides a timely way to examine the role of public relations through a lens other than corporate PR. It also provides an opportunity to infuse topics and theories related to diversity, equity and inclusion into the public relations classroom.

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Appendix

Podcast Assignment: Students are placed in groups of four to five, with each group assigned a social movement. Students first work individually and then collaboratively on five smaller assignments, as follows:

1. Secondary research report (individual assignment): Directions: In order to begin what will eventually become a podcast, you'll need to have identified and reviewed extensive research related to the movement and key communicator you're investigating. This assignment asks you to identify at least 20 sources of secondary research. Your sources must include all of the following:

- Historical newspaper articles
- Historical research from government sources (ex: The Library of Congress)
- Scholarly research like peer reviewed journal articles

- An interview with a historian (can be print, audio or visual)

2. Abstract draft (individual assignment): Now that you have conducted ample research, summarize your findings and prepare for the creation of your podcast. In no more than 300 words, write a preliminary abstract that summarizes your findings. Imagine that your podcast is complete and you're writing the abstract to describe your podcast.

Questions you might answer in your abstract:

- What is the podcast about?
- What are you trying to prove or disprove?
- What is the connection between this person, the movement and public relations?
- Why does this person matter?
- What is the long-term impact of this person's communication work?

You will revise your abstract. This is not the final version, but it's a starting point for you. Once you finalize your podcast, you'll develop the final abstract to reflect the final content in your podcast.

3. Podcast script: As a group, you will write the script for a 10-15 minute podcast (about 2,000+ words).

Requirements:

- All members of the group must speak in the podcast so they all must be written into the script.
- You must craft a sponsor message. Here is a simple sponsor message template: "[Your podcast name] is sponsored by [the name of your department] at [the name of your college or university]. For more information, visit [departmental website]."

Important Notes:

- Name your podcast!
- Consider what you want your podcast episode to convey. Think about the theme or the ideas that you most want to share. Craft your script with an objective in mind. What do you want people to learn or remember?
- Use storytelling in your podcast. Make it a good story!
- You may want to consider the "did you know" or "undiscovered" angles – what did you find out that you think many people may not know about?
- Write a script that you would want to listen to! What can you do to make it interesting, fun, unique or entertaining? Have fun with it.
- Bottom line: your podcast should not be dull, and you should not simply read the biographies of the people you're highlighting.
- Remember that this podcast should cover public relations and the social movement you've chosen. Keep the focus on the ways that communication was used to achieve an objective in the movement, and the communication strategies and tactics utilized by the people you are highlighting in your podcast.
- Discuss topics like:
    - The communication strategies and tactics used to achieve a specific objective
    - The intended audience of a message
    - The ways that targeted audiences were communicated with, when and why
    - Consider the role of the speaker
    - Consider the channels used to distribute communication
    - Consider the role of the media. How was media used to convey messages of the movement? What media? Where?

When? Why?

• Consider the role of influence, public opinion and perception. How were attitudes or behaviors changed as a result of this person's work?

• Did the communicator achieve her objective? How? Why/why not?

What was the impact of the communication?

Use the information in this link for help in crafting your podcast script:

https://www.buzzsprout.com/blog/write-podcast-script-examples

4. Podcast recording: Now that you've crafted your podcast script, you will record your podcast! As a group, you will produce one 10-15-minute podcast that covers public relations and a social movement, keeping the focus on the ways that communication was used to achieve an objective in the movement, and the communication strategies and tactics utilized by the specific communicators of the movement.

Requirements:

- As a group, you will produce one 10-15-minute podcast.
- Your podcast must have a name.
- All members of your group must be introduced and must speak in the podcast.
- Your podcast should cover public relations and your chosen social movement. Keep the focus on the ways that communication was used to achieve an objective in the movement, and the communication strategies and tactics utilized by the people you are highlighting in your podcast.

Helpful tips:

- Use the information in this link for help in all things with your podcast! It has a ton of great information: https://www.npr.org/2018/10/30/662070097/starting-your-podcast-a-guide-for-students#toolbox

- You may also want to watch this video about writing for the ear: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeeoGr2Ru60
- You can use any app that you choose to record the podcast. If you have a Mac, you should have GarageBand. There's also Audacity, which is a free audio editing app. There are tons more. Totally up to your group.

Note: It's ok if you deviate from your initial script a bit, especially after watching the video about writing for the ear, above. Focus on telling an accurate, interesting story in a way that will hold your listeners' attention.

Assignment submission: Due to the size of your audio file, please upload the file to your Google Drive and then share the link to the file with me via our course site.

5. Podcast visuals – Cover Art (group assignment): Finally, now that your podcast is complete, you will make a podcast cover image to entice listeners. This is the visual preview of your podcast and it should capture the subject and tone of your podcast. You will make one cover image for your podcast.

Using Canva's free templates for different genres, create your podcast cover art: https://www.canva.com/podcast-covers/templates/

Important Notes to consider when designing your cover art:

- What is the podcast about?
- What images will entice listeners?
- What fonts will convey your message appropriately?
- What colors are most appropriate?

For additional information about creating podcast artwork, search for content from Apple music and/or Buzzsprout (a podcast hosting site).

6. Podcast Poster (Group Assignment)

For this assignment, you will produce a poster for presentation at the upcoming Student Research Day that highlights the research and creation of your podcast. This is a group project to be completed with your podcast group, and only one poster is needed per group. You will create a physical, printed poster.

You will use your podcast as the basis of your poster, which means the person or people you researched becomes your primary "case" for analysis in the poster. When you present at the symposium, you will present your poster and bring along your iPads so that participants can listen to your podcast as well.

Best Practices for Design: I suggest using Canva to create your poster. Posters should be created in landscape format (imagine a PowerPoint slide). For additional information about best practices in creating academic posters, visit your library or office of undergraduate research.

Your poster must include the following:

- A title
- An analysis of the ways that public relations strategies and

tactics were used in your topic. Highlight topics and sub-topics that you think are noteworthy.

- Your eventual podcast name and visual cover art that you created.
- Key Takeaways. What did you learn about public relations and social movements?
- Use images, tables, graphs, charts, etc., to communicate as appropriate.

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Looking Back, Stepping Forward: COVID-19 PR KSA Development and Adaptation Assessment for Post-traumatic Growth

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ABSTRACT

Class tested assignments: a sequential series of assignments and an activity developed for senior PR students in a capstone PR management and research class.

Keywords: public relations; post-traumatic growth; knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs); diversity, equity and inclusion; career preparation; pandemic

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Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a worldwide trauma (Prideaux, 2021). Young people, who make up most of post-secondary student bodies, are experiencing these effects in many ways (Mental Health America, 2021). For example, the US Surgeon General recently announced a mental health crisis among America's youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). This assignment helps PR senior students who have been learning in the pandemic access post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth, both a process and outcome, occurs when traumatic experiences result in positive growth (Tedeschi et al., 2018). It is fostered by education, specifically reflexive meaning-building exercises and the development of narratives about what has happened and the opportunities that this provides (Tedeschi, 2020). While the pandemic is not yet over, seniors shed their student identities when graduating, marking an opportunity to reflect on the end of their roles as students during the pandemic and foster such post-traumatic growth.

Procedure

To facilitate this process, this series of assignments has senior students identify KSAs – Knowledge, Skills and Abilities – that they've developed or adapted in their PR courses in response to the pandemic. This occurs through a KSA assessment via a handout and in-class activity with a list of KSAs culled from recent research and industry reports on topics ranging from entry-level PR hiring (DiStaso et al., 2019; Krishna et al., 2020; Meganck et al., 2020) to pandemic KSA development (Cukier et al., 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). (See Table 1 in Appendix A and Table 1 in Appendix D). They then analyze how these KSAs provide them with competitive advantages by developing an interview guide and undertaking information interviews with PR professionals on hiring and emergent pandemic PR trends using the list (see Appendices B and D). To facilitate these interviews students are invited to connect to the professor's LinkedIn profile representative of the course's alumni network, and in-class discussions detail how to research and network with potential interviewees in these networks. Finally students synthesize what they've learned from their KSA assessment and the interviews in a short report (see Appendix C).

Rationale

Such work enables two particular post-traumatic growth outcomes. The first, personal strength outcomes, occurs when students realize how strong they've been facing pandemic challenges (Tedeschi, 2020). The second, identifying new possibilities, occurs when students assess how their newly developed or adapted KSAs provide them with opportunities in the PR field (Tedeschi, 2020).

Student Learning Goals

- Recognize the strength exemplified in developing or adapting knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) during the pandemic, as well as the opportunities afforded by those same KSAs.
- Adopt a strategic framework to analyze and understand how challenging events provide strategic opportunities.
- Gain actual experience developing, recruiting and undertaking interviews for strategic analytic purposes.
- Ensure equal access to professionalization networks and networking knowledge.

Connection to PR Theory and Practice

This exercise was developed for my senior capstone in PR management and research for PR majors. The course requires students, working in agency teams, to develop a strategic PR plan (SPP) for a client. One of the challenges students typically face in the classroom is how to begin to think strategically. This often occurs when students are asked what opportunities their potential clients face during the client appraisal process as well as in their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analyses (SWOTs). This exercise shows them how to assess contextual value and opportunities, and therefore provides scaffolding for how to develop those aspects of the SPP. It also prepares students for the primary research needs of the SPP, such as client briefing interviews or primary employee research, via actual interview development, experience and analysis. These experiences are similar to what one would encounter in professional strategic PR contexts. Additionally, the first activity in this series of assignments, the student KSA assessment, provides students with a researched handout with KSAs that they may have developed or adapted in response to the pandemic. Working with this handout expands students' knowledge of their own pandemic KSA repertoires. Finally, research shows that a key barrier to professionalization for first generation and historically under-represented students involves lack of access to professional networks and networking education (Parks-Yancy, 2012; Stanislaus et al., 2021; Terry & Fobia, 2019). This assignment is one small step toward ensuring that such access and learning occurs, as called for by the most recent Public Relations Society of America report on diversity, equity and inclusion (Blow et al., 2021).

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

The assignment's reassessment process ensures students adopt a strategic framework to their pandemic induced KSAs. As one student noted in her final assignment: "Overall, this assignment forced me to reflect on me. It allowed me to see light in all the negative that has happened over the course of the past few years. Most of all it allowed me to take my past experiences and analyze how the pandemic made me even more prepared to enter the industry." (The student has provided permission to have this portion of their work used publicly).

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Appendix A

KSA Assessment Exercise for Student Completion

This assignment is done in class and submitted for participation credit.

1. Think back to when the pandemic started. What did you have to do to ***shift*** to learning online? Bullet points are fine.
2. After you got online, what did you need to do to ***keep*** effectively learning online? Think about technical skills, communication with classmates/professors, and what you needed to do to take care of yourself during this period of change. Bullet points are fine.
3. The next page contains a list of key PR knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). Bolded items identify KSAs that research shows are important both for PR and pandemic purposes. Identify your level of experience with all the items in the list.
4. Review these skills again. Are there any items on the list that you had to newly develop because of the pandemic? Are there any items that you had to adapt because of the pandemic? Provide a short explanation next to each identified item.
5. List the skills you've identified using, developing or adapting during the pandemic here. Rank them in order of most to least important. Write a paragraph that details why your top three KSAs are most important to you now as a student. How have they helped you be a successful student during the pandemic? What advantages, if any, have they given you as a student during the pandemic?

Table 1

Sample of Table for Student KSA Assessment

KSA and Associated References	Description	Experience level	Pandemic develop-ment? Y/N	Pandemic adaptation? Y/N	Pandemic explanation
Creativity	"Your ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel, unexpected, or challenge existing methods and norms." (Cukier et al., 2021, p. 21).	1 2 3 4 5			

Note. The full table that is used with students is found in Appendix D. This table sample shows the headings that are used with that table for students during the first KSA assessment activity.

Appendix B

Information Interview Assignment

When interviewing someone, whether it's a PR professional or a client for a client assessment or a member of a key public, you'll want to have an interview guide to help your interview flow. This handout is designed to help you develop an interview guide.

Researchers use interviews to investigate how others see and understand the world. Doing interviews can help us:

1) Ask questions that are important for our society or culture;
2) Help leverage previous knowledge; and/or

3) Help us learn something new or unexpected.

Information interviews are designed to help you better understand what it's like to work in a field in practice. For career planning purposes, they're useful to assess which of your sets of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) are needed; KSA deficiencies; which KSAs might be in demand in the near future; as well as identifying KSAs that will help you stand out from others in your field.

To find someone to undertake an information interview with, use your network – ask friends and family, search LinkedIn and any professional directory of which you're a member (for instance, PRSSA). When you contact them, tell them that you identified them as someone to potentially chat with based on your mutual connection "X" (name of your mutual connection here). Ask them for a twenty-thirty minute information interview about public relations. Let them know you'll soon be a recent graduate of [*your institution's name here*]'s PR program, and you're undertaking an assessment of KSAs you've developed as a result of the pandemic. After they agree to participate, let them know that you've got a list of key PR KSAs that you'll be using during the interview and will be sending to them in advance of the interview (see Appendix D). You'll also need to ask your participant to let you record the interview so you can use the answers for a KSA value assessment assignment.

To develop your interview guide, take the following steps:

1. Do some research. Generally for any interview you want to identify what is already known about a topic (in this case, KSAs in relation to early career jobs), and what is not known. For an information interview in general, you'll want to:
    a. Have a general understanding of some of the practices of the person you'll be interviewing. For instance, if you

choose to interview someone who specializes in crisis communication, what are some of the key things that happen in crisis communication versus media relations? PRSA is a good resource for this; see https://www.prsa.org/about/all-about-pr

b. Have a sense of some of the trends in the field. For instance, what's been happening as a result of the pandemic that might have affected the person you're talking with? To do this, scan through some industry publications such as PR News or PR Daily.

2. Based on this research, develop some research questions that you want answered by the information interview. For example, one research question might be "What KSAs do I need to start a position in the PR field?" For information interviews, research questions can cover a variety of topics; below is a list of common topics. Please choose which ones you'll cover in your interview and develop at least one research question for each topic that you choose.

Common information interview topics

Job fit - common KSAs needed for the job.

What are industry trends? Where is the industry heading?

What KSAs are regularly used?

What KSAs aren't needed?

What KSAs are rare and highly needed?

How are KSAs best gained?

Preconceptions about the everyday job that aren't true.

The everyday job practice.

3. List your research questions here. You should have three minimum research questions.

a.
b.
c.

4. After developing a list of research questions, you'll need to operationalize them into questions that make sense to your participant. For example, a research question that asks "What knowledge do I need to start a position in the PR field?" could generate the following participant questions:

   a. What do you do during an average day?
   b. Thinking about the average day you just described, what skills do you need to do the things you described doing?
   c. Of these skills you just identified, which ones do you think are the most important? Why?

List your interview questions here:

5. Make sure your interview questions address research questions: list 6 interview questions and identify which research questions they address. For example, if the first interview question is: 'Thinking about the average day you just described, what skills do you need to do the things you described doing?', and the corresponding research question is 'A: What knowledge skills do I need to start a position in the PR field?", you would indicate

   a. Interview Question #1: Thinking about the average day you just described, what skills do you need to do the things you described doing?
   b. Which research question Interview Question #1 addresses: A

      i. Interview Question #1:

Which research question Interview Question #1 addresses:
ii. Interview Question #2:
Which research question Interview Question #2 addresses:
iii. Interview Question #3:
Which research question Interview Question #3 addresses:
iv. Interview Question #4:
Which research question Interview Question #4 addresses:
v. Interview Question #5:
Which research question Interview Question #5 addresses:
vi. Interview Question #6:
Which research question Interview Question #6 addresses:

6. You'll want to make sure your interview feels like a conversation, not just a Q & A session. Identify two interview questions from your list of interview questions that each represent introductory, transition, key and closing questions below. Identifying these will help ensure that you're appropriately structuring your interview.
   a. Introductory Questions:
      i. Question 1
      ii. Question 2
   b. Transition Questions:
      i. Question 1
      ii. Question 2
   c. Key Questions:
      i. Question 1
      ii. Question 2
   d. Closing Questions
      i. Question 1
      ii. Question 2

7. Your final task is to make sure your participants will understand your questions, and that they'll get you good responses. Review your questions and make sure that they follow these guidelines:

   a. They ask one question at a time (i.e.: no double-barreled questions)
   b. They aren't leading
   c. They are open-ended
   d. They provide opportunities for participants to provide detailed answers
   e. They're written in plain language and are easy to understand (i.e., they do not use jargon or academic language)

8. Attach your interview guide as a Word document to your submission. It should contain, in the following order:

   a. your research questions;
   b. your interview questions, including:
   introductory, transition, key and ending questions in the order in which you'd like to ask them.

9. After submitting your interview guide, you'll need to add several key questions that are detailed below to your interview guide. These questions MUST BE ASKED during the interview. You may need to remove or adapt several questions from your interview guide to make room for these key questions.

   1. Using the list of KSAs that I sent, what do you think are the top three KSAs that are needed for an early PR career? Why these three?
   2. What are some of the key trends that you see emerging in the PR field as a result of the pandemic?
   3. Using the same list of KSAs, what do you think are the

top three KSAs that are needed to take advantage of these key trends? Why these three?

Appendix C

KSA Value Assessment

Congratulations! You've undertaken an assessment of KSAs that you've developed or adapted in relation to the pandemic. You've also developed an information interview guide and interviewed a PR practitioner to get information about key career issues and trends in the PR industry during COVID-19. This assignment has you merge this information together to identify which of your KSAs have the most value for your PR career moving forward during the pandemic. In other words, what KSAs should you highlight in career materials and processes like resumes, interviews and career plans?

Learning Objectives

- Synthesize information to assess the strategic value of pandemic-affected KSAs to your career.
- Strategically reflect on how events can function as opportunities.

Assignment Instructions

1. Whom did you interview? List their name, position and company that they currently work for.
2. Using the list of KSAs, what did your PR practitioner think were the three major KSAs that would be needed for an early PR career? Bullet points are fine here.
3. Using the list of KSAs, what did your PR practitioner think were the three major KSAs that would be needed in the field in the near future, given industry trends and the pandemic? Bullet points are fine here.
4. Of the six KSAs that your PR practitioner identified as important

for beginning your PR career or for the field's future, list the top three KSAs that you have the most experience with from your KSA exercise sheet. Provide a paragraph on each KSA that describes what the KSA is and how you've used it during the pandemic. This writeup should detail how, if at all, you've had to adapt or learn the KSA as a result of the pandemic.

   a. Of these top three KSAs, how do you think you can emphasize them in your career search materials? Think specifically about products or processes that you'll be undertaking as part of your career search, such as resumes, portfolios or interview preparation. Your answer should be a minimum of one paragraph and a maximum of three, and use examples.

5. Of the six KSAs that your interviewee identified as important to your early career or for the field's future, which one was most challenging to develop or adapt during the pandemic? Why? What were some of the specific challenges? How did you successfully deal with those barriers to use or adapt the KSA? Your answer should represent a minimum of one paragraph and a maximum of three paragraphs.

6. Go back to your list of ranked skills from your skill assessment exercise for being a student. Given what you've learned from your interview, re-rank them in order of most to least important for beginning your PR career. Write a paragraph that details why the top three KSAs in this list will be most important to you as you start your PR career. How will they help you succeed at the beginning of your career? What advantages, if any, will they give you as you begin your career during the pandemic?

Appendix D

Handout for PR Practitioners during Information Interview

The following is a list of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that have been identified in research and industry reports as important for PR careers, as well as for careers during the pandemic. KSAs that represent both PR and pandemic concerns have been bolded.

Table 1

Handout for PR Practitioners that details KSAs

KSA and Associated References	Description
Creativity (Cukier et al., 2021; DiStaso, 2019; Krishna et al.; 2020).	"Your ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel, unexpected, or challenge existing methods and norms" (Cukier et al., 2021, p. 21).
Crisis response (Krishna et al., 2020; Public Relations Society of America [PRSA], 2022a; 2022b).	"Acts appropriately at pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 2).
Critical thinking (Cukier et al., 2021; DiStaso, 2019).	"Making logical and reasoned judgments that are well thought out" (Radford University, 2022).
Diverity and inclusion (DiStaso, 2019; PRSA, 2022b).	"Identifies and respects a range of differences among key publics. Researches and addresses the cultural preferences and/or needs and barriers to communication with key publics. Develops culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies and tactics" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 1).

Ethical behavior (DiStaso, 2019; PRSA, 2022a, 2022b).	"Conducts professional activities in a lawful and principled manner; adheres to commonly accepted standards for professional behavior" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 1).
Evaluation (PRSA, 2022a, 2022b).	"Determines if goals and objectives of public relations program were met and the extent to which outcomes of public relations programs have been accomplished" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 2).
Implementation (PRSA, 2022a, 2022b).	"Develops timeframes, budgets; assigns responsibilities" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 1)
Leadership (Meganck et al., 2020; PRSA, 2022b).	"Motivates and inspires others, builds coalitions and communicates vision" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 3).
Organizational skills (Meganck et al., 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [OECD], 2021; PRSA, 2022b).	"Integrates multiple dimensions of a public relations campaign. Combines internal and external components, so that messages are synchronized" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 3).
Perseverance (Cukier et al., 2021; Institute for Public Relations [IPR] & PRSA, 2017).	"Persistence toward goal when facing obstacles" (IPR & PRSA, 2017, p. 14).
Planning (PRSA, 2022a, 2022b).	"Develops goals, objectives, publics, strategy and key messages based on research findings" (PRSA, 2022a, p. 1).
Problem solving (Cukier et al., 2021; DiStaso, 2019; PRSA, 2022b).	"Approaches problems with sound reasoning and logic. Distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information... Makes sound, well-informed and objective decisions in a timely manner" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 3).

Research (Krishna et al., 2020; PRSA, 2022a, 2022b).	"Uses a variety of research tools to gather information about the employer or client, industry and relevant issues. Investigates stake-holders' understanding of the product, organization and issues" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 1).
Self-control (Cukier et al., 2021; IPR & PRSA, 2017).	Manage stress and setbacks well and make measured, rather than impulsive decisions. (IPR & PRSA, 2017).
Sociality (IPR & PRSA, 2017; DiStaso, 2019).	"Good listeners who communicate clearly and confidently with those from different backgrounds" (IPR & PRSA, 2017, p. 16).
Social media literacy (Cukier et al., 2021; DiStaso, 2019; Krishna et al., 2020; Meganck et al., 2020).	"Knowledge of…channels, strat-egies, analytics" (Meganck et al., 2020, p. 5).
Understands business processes (Krishna et al., 2020; PRSA, 2022a, 2022b).	"Explains how employers/clients generate revenue and how their operations are conducted. Identifies relevant business drivers and how they impact the business" (PRSA, 2022b, p. 3).
Writing (DiStaso, 2019; Krishna et al.; 2020; Meganck et al., 2020).	"Able to write for all platforms (traditional, social media, internal communications, web/on-line)" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2017, p. 35).
Pandemic Specific KSAs	
Active learning (Cukier et al., 2021).	"Continuous learning" (Cukier et al., 2021, p. 25).
Adaptive (Cukier et al., 2021).	"Able to adjust to new situations or surroundings" (Oxford University Press [OUP], n.d.a).

Collaborative (Cukier et al., 2021; OECD, 2021).	“A group of people working in collaboration to achieve a common goal” (OUP, n.d.b).
Flexibility (Cukier, et al., 2021).	“The ability to change or be changed easily according to the situation” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).
Resilient (Cukier et al., 2021).	“Tending to recover quickly or easily from misfortune, shock,…” (OUP, n.d.c).
Uses new environments (Cukier et al., 2021).	“Increased virtual connections internally and externally” (Cukier et al., 2021, p. 24).

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BOOK REVIEW

Social Media and Society: An Introduction to the Mass Media Landscape

Reviewed by
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Social Media and Society: An Introduction to the Mass Media Landscape
Authors: Regina Luttrell and Adrienne A. Wallace
Rowman & Littlefield, 2021
ISBN: 978153812908

Social Media and Society: An Introduction to the Mass Media Landscape is an excellent, timely, and straightforward resource for educators, students, and practitioners alike, including those with limited prior social media knowledge and experience.

Structure and Organization

The book has 12 chapters and is divided into three parts: "Social Media Defined, Distinguished, and Delineated," "Communication Contexts for Social Media," and "Suggestions and Advice for Using Social Media." The beginning of each chapter focuses the reader on the main learning objectives and a relevant scenario from the real world and ends with a chapter wrap-up; useful critical-thinking questions and practically-oriented activities that could be implemented inside or outside of the classroom (including online); a list of key concepts; and a list of media sources. The authors also weave relevant theoretical concepts into the book through "In Theory" breakout sections that help readers apply theory to public relations practice in society. All of these thoughtful and practical details are among the central benefits of this well-researched, visually appealing book and are among what makes this book a clear and effective contribution to the body of public relations education.

Part one, “Social Media Defined, Distinguished, and Delineated,” tackles how we define social media today, detailing the elements of Hlavac’s (2014) Social Media Pyramid – social networks, news aggregators, passion connections, video connections, thought leaders, and virtual communities in chapter one. This section also examines the “Dark Side” and the opportunities associated with social media. Chapter two on the “Dark Side” covers topics such as deepfakes, cyberbullying, trolling, fake news, privacy, disinformation, and hate speech, while also diving into domestic and foreign legislation related to social media and the negative psychological and physiological effects of social media. The final chapter in part one discusses the positive advantages of social media such as social connections, social support, the building of social capital, and the proliferation of trusted user-generated content. Chapter three covers social media’s positive contributions in research, big data, websleuthing, newsgathering, citizen journalism, and stakeholder communications, specifically through engagement. This chapter also includes ten helpful guidelines and recommendations for ethical and responsible personal and professional social media use, including: 1) “Know how the tools work;” 2) “Be aware of your social, geopolitical, and industry environments;” 3) “Evaluate before posting;” 4) “Use social media wisely;” 5) “Decide what is private and then act accordingly;” 6) “Understand the data so you can USE it;” 7) “Ask questions and self-regulate;” 8) “Consider your data collection behavior;” 9) “Don’t add to the drama;” and 10) “Take a hard line on the negative side of social media” (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021, pp. 44-46).

Part two, “Communication Contexts for Social Media,” discusses traditional and niche media and covers key mass communication theories such as gatekeeping and agenda-setting in chapter four. The remaining chapters in this section – chapters five through ten – explore the role and impact of social media across various public relations sectors, including business (chapter five), crisis (chapter six), sports (chapter seven), politics and civics (chapter eight), health (chapter nine), and entertainment (chapter ten). These chapters feature scene-setting scenarios and commentary involving Warby Parker, the CDC and COVID-19, broadcaster Mike Tirico, the Women’s March, #CaravanToCanada and #insulin4all, and Taylor Swift, demonstrating the broad relevance and importance of social media across industries and society.

Part three, “Suggestions and Advice for Using Social Media,” provides guidance regarding social media measurement and evaluation (chapter 11) and careers in social media strategy and management (chapter 12). Chapter 11 introduces readers to important concepts like organic media, paid media, vanity metrics, return on investment (ROI), and key performance indicators (KPIs), while differentiating between metrics and analytics. The authors offer details on Google Analytics, YouTube Analytics, Facebook Analytics, LinkedIn Analytics, Twitter Analytics, and Snapchat Analytics, including providing various visual figures from each platform to assist readers with understanding the concepts introduced in the text. Chapter 12 highlights the skills necessary to work in the social media field, which the authors identify as “writing; data, analytics and trend spotting; and creativity, strategy, and planning” (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021, p. 183). The authors note that those who want to be successful in social media careers must be cognizant of trends as social media evolves and they provide readers with some tools that can help them remain up to date on new and emerging developments. The final chapter is resourcerich, directing readers to a variety of supplemental websites aimed at allowing them to further enhance their professional development and experiential learning in the aforementioned skill areas.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A strength of this book is that it is written in a more informal and conversational manner than many academic works, thus making it user-friendly and enjoyable for students, faculty, and future or current practitioners, including those with limited knowledge of or experience with social media at the outset. Future editions of this book could be improved with chapters on public relations sectors such as technology, hospitality, travel and tourism, lifestyle, beauty, and fashion as social media are integral to these industries. Though this book features some examples from brands like Gucci and CoverGirl, additional standalone chapters on these popular public relations sectors would provide greater depth to an already robust resource. Furthermore, part three could benefit from incorporating content on diversity, equity, and inclusion either as a standalone chapter or by integrating this important topic into the existing chapter frameworks. Additionally, the authors may consider adding more public relations-focused theories in the future.

The authors note that the goal of the book is to, "engage students as consumers and creators of social media by providing a framework for understanding and connection among social media, mass communications, and the impact on society" (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021, p. vii). They have succeeded and I commend their efforts! I recommend this book without hesitation as a required or suggested reading in undergraduate courses such as survey of public relations, introduction to mass media, mass media and society, social media strategy, social media and society, and more. The book can be used in its entirety or adopted for its applicable sections or chapters, depending on curriculum and pedagogical needs.

References

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BOOK REVIEW

The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication

Reviewed by
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The Future of Feminism in Public Relation and Strategic Communication
Authors: Linda Aldoory and Elizabeth Toth
Rowman & Littlefield, 2021
ISBN: 978-1-5381-2824-4

In *The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication*, Aldoory and Toth present a comprehensive review of public relations literature that has addressed feminism, gender, race, LGBTQ, and marginalized groups in the field of public relations and organized that work into a socio-ecological model. The final model presented in the book demonstrates how research and practice in public relations have been influenced at the practitioner level, organizational level, professional level, media level, and ideological level. The book also provides an analysis and critique of the multiple factors that have constituted meaning about women, people of color, and LGBTQ practitioners and its influence on research and practice in public relations. Finally, the authors opened up a dialogue with scholars and practitioners (see Chapter 11), which informed the final model presented in the book. The content presented in this book is complex, but Aldoory and Toth are skilled at making these concepts accessible, organized, and easy to follow. The book's scope is rather broad, attempting to review and organize an entire field of literature. Still, the authors expertly present the content in a way that makes this a practical resource for scholars at all levels.

Content and Scope

The first section sets the stage for the research that is to come later in the book. In Chapter 1, Aldoory and Toth take time to define socio-ecological models and provide examples of how such models have been used, such as Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy of influences model that illustrates the multiple influences that shape media content. The authors then sharpen their focus on applying a socio-ecological model to public relations and present the first iteration of their model, which becomes the organizing structure for the remainder of the book. Chapter 2, aptly titled "The Backstory," is beneficial to the book, especially if the reader is new to feminism and the academic study of public relations. The authors define public relations from various perspectives, including functional structuralist, rhetorical and critical, and postmodern. Aldoory and Toth then take to task the job of presenting the varying conceptualizations and approaches to feminism, reviewing feminist research, and discussing feminism communication theory. The chapter concludes with a section on intersectionality, presenting it as a method for considering "the multiplicative effects of identities and oppressions" (p. 31).

Sections two through five are the heart and soul of the book where the authors start broadly, at the ideological level of the model, and work their way through the remaining levels of the proposed model, concluding with the practitioner level. Throughout the chapters in these sections, the authors take care to define key concepts, explain why they placed particular concepts in certain parts of the model, and present relevant research. For example, Chapter 3 focuses on the ideological level of the model and includes macro-level discussions of hegemony, capitalism, Marxism, classism, critical race theory, racism, feminism, sexism, heteronormativity, and homophobia. These high-level discussions about broader ideals are always brought back to how they are relevant to public relations. This structure allows Aldoory and Toth to provide the reader with a primer on the higher-level ideologies and return them to a public relations emphasis while presenting the reader with an overview of extant literature in these areas. Several chapters within this section include a case study to illustrate the main ideas presented in the chapter. For example, Chapter 9 consists of a case study, "The Feminist Fallacy" at the Practitioner Level, which the authors describe as "a discouraging yet cautionary case example of how feminism can be co-opted and designed to be against women's better selves. This case shows the invisibility of class, education, race, and gender influences while also assuming a success story for women" (p. 151).

Section six concludes the book with two chapters that includes a summary and a call to action, respectively. Chapter 11 was an interesting and thought-provoking read as Aldoory and Toth brought together women from different backgrounds and countries to discuss feminism, the challenges for women and people of color in public relations, and the proposed socio-ecological model. The chapter is devoted to highlights from a two-day discussion in which participants spoke candidly about issues like racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and bias in research. The scholars also weighed in on the socio-ecological model and suggested adjustments to the model so that the professional and organizational levels were moved, arguing that the organizational level has a more direct influence on the practitioner level than the professional level. Chapter 12 accounts for the authors' changes to the model after receiving feedback from their peers. The book ends with a call to action, where Aldoory and Toth acknowledge this is not a definitive work but rather a call for continued professional and scholarly discourse that deepens an understanding of the problems of racism, sexism, and homophobia in public relations. The model here is new and has not been used before, but we hope it will become a helpful tool for future research. (p. 195)

Contribution to PR Education

Through a comprehensive overview of the extant literature on public relations and feminism and a model that serves as an organizing structure, Aldoory and Toth provide the reader with an introductory course on the state of feminist research in public relations and identify gaps in the research. Their book contributes to PR education by demonstrating the need for continued scholarly work that is more comprehensive and includes the experiences of women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and other marginalized groups not represented in the current body of research. They challenge scholars to critique the structures that uphold patriarchal values, limit change, and prohibit social justice.

Audience

The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication is an essential read especially for the new scholar interested in studying feminism, public relations, and strategic communication. The book's structure lends itself well to be used as a text in a graduate seminar on public relations or feminism or as a researcher's guide to previous scholarship. The book covers a variety of issues and perspectives on public relations and serves as an instruction manual for interpreting such problems and perspectives with a critical lens. The accessibility of the writing in this book would make it a practical addition to a graduate-level course.

Critique

In their discussion of intersectionality (Chapter 2), Aldoory and Toth write, “We believe in the criterion of reflexivity and promote it among our students and in our paper. Thus, for transparency and analysis purposes, we describe below some of our reflexive thoughts about our own feminism and how we came to be feminists” (p. 33). In that same spirit, I would like to disclose that, as a researcher, my studies are situated in the social scientific, empirical tradition, and I frequently seek opportunities to research with co-authors who specialize in qualitative methods. I find value using a mixed methods approach to research. I disclose this about myself because my one critique of this book is that as a feminist, I want to do research that answers the call put forth by Aldoory and Toth in the book, but there is limited guidance in how to do that from different research traditions. All scholars, including those of us whose work is more empirical, would benefit from the arguments made in this book about the need for more research to examine gender, class, race, and sexual orientation and should consider how to make our research methods more inclusive. Doing so would help us create a richer understanding of the public relations discipline.

Conclusion

Aldoory and Toth took on the challenge to review and organize an entire body of literature in one book, and started a conversation on where the field should go next. My critique of The Future of Feminism in Public Relations and Strategic Communication came from a place of being inspired to want to do more to promote social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion in public relations scholarship. But I also acknowledge that one book can’t be all things to all people. What makes this a compelling book is that it inspires with facts and information, and it shows the reader where we are in the field and how far we still have to go to create a body of knowledge that accounts for the experiences of people from varied backgrounds.

References

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