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1999 Commission on Public Relations Education, 10/1999

Summary: Introduction

Why a "Port of Entry" Report?

Public relations has come of age, and with that has come a critical need for broadly-based education that is relevant and connected to the practice.

The changes in public relations practice since the 1987 Commission on Public Relations Education Report are numerous and profound. At root, these changes reflect nothing less than the way the world has changed and continues to change, seemingly spinning ever faster and veering in new directions. But, happily, the changes also reflect a broad acceptance of the validity of modern public relations practice to a global society that is increasingly interdependent, increasingly interconnected.

By any measure, the growth of the public relations profession over the past decade has been astonishing. Public relations firms not only proliferate but also reach a size and scope undreamed of in the 1980s. Membership in established and new professional societies and trade associations spirals upward. And, most important, virtually every kind of institution, for-profit and not-for-profit alike, recognizes the need for dialogue with the groups of people who can and will influence its future.

This growth, evolution and maturation of public relations is sure to continue. Elements are in place for impressive incremental growth and change in the next century: the spread of democratic institutions around the world; the growing importance of communicating with internal as well as external publics; the veritable explosion of one-to-one communication and the technology to implement it; and the steady advance of the public relations body of knowledge, especially analysis of public awareness and change in attitudes and behavior.

Public Relations' Next Crisis?

The future is indeed bright for the field of public relations. But there is one major qualification — having enough trained people to meet the expanding demand for public relations services and counsel. In fact, one expert observer of the field has called this "public relations' next crisis."

Hyperbole aside, there is no doubt that providing qualified practitioners will be a serious problem. Law and medicine have methods, admittedly long-term, to deal with the supply and demand for their professionals. Public relations doesn't. In fact, public relations is a long way from what Dr. Clark Kerr, former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, has articulated as a model for such a flow: "Some new professions are being born; others are becoming more professional, for example, business administration and social work. The university becomes the chief port of entry for these professions. In fact, a profession gains its identity by making the university the port of entry." (Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 4th edition, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA/London, 1995.)

It is not the Commission's purpose here to rekindle the ever-smoldering embers of the debate as to whether public relations is a profession. The Commission cites Dr. Kerr only to identify the "use of the university" as one important potential solution to the problem of having enough trained public relations practitioners in the next century.

Other sources of public relations talent, mined successfully for some time, are, indeed, still productive. Former journalists, once a primary candidate cohort, offer valuable skills but, perhaps, limited conceptual understanding of the scope of public relations. Professionals from law, medicine, government, management consulting and other parallel fields often offer relevant attributes but are frequently most valuable in narrowly focused areas of public relations practice.

And therein lies the opportunity, at the entry level and higher, for well-prepared graduates of the public relations academy. Grounded in the liberal arts and sciences. Well-prepared in public relations theory and practice. Tested not only in the classroom but in the field. Understanding the inherent connection between public relations and management, sociology and the many other pillars of modern society. But also with the necessary skills —

writing, analyzing, thinking — sharpened and ready for use.

This is the kind of public relations education the Commission has attempted to design. Its recommendations have their roots in earlier Commission reports and in the public relations curricula that in recent years have been producing an increasing number of successful practitioners. But the Commission has gone beyond the present to suggest what public relations education in the future can and must look like if it is to meet the needs of the profession as the new century begins.

The Commission hopes its report will be used by academic programs and faculty to evaluate and develop their curricula; by practitioners who hire graduates of public relations programs; and by academic and professional associations which set standards for academic program certification and accreditation and for the chartering of student public relations organizations.

A final word: this "Port of Entry" report embraces not only the education appropriate for that literal first entry into public relations but, by extension, re-entry or continued service in public relations through graduate study or continuing education.

In short, the public relations education of the next century envisioned by the Commission, like public relations itself, is a matter of continuous professional growth and development. The Commission invites students and potential students, faculty and other academic leaders, certification and accreditation bodies and public relations practitioners to buy into and profit from the greatly improved "Port of Entry" education this report describes.

Full Text: 1. Summary of the Report

Purpose and Goals of the 1999 Commission

The Commission saw its purpose as determining curricular guidelines and recommendations that, if followed, will prepare public relations students of all ages and levels of ability for the professional challenges of the 21st century as public relations practitioners carry out their fundamental responsibility of building understanding, credibility and trust between organizations and their publics.

The Commission's goals were to determine the knowledge and skills needed by practitioners in a technological, multicultural and global society, and then to recommend learning outcomes — what students should know and be able to do — for undergraduate, graduate and continuing education. The Commission also sought to address appropriate teaching methods, faculty credentials and resources to deliver these learning outcomes. Finally, the Commission sought to suggest methods appropriate for evaluating both student learning and the quality of the academic programs in which public relations is taught.

The Commission based its deliberations and recommendations in large part upon what it learned from an omnibus survey of public relations practitioners and educators co-sponsored by the National Communication Association in connection with its 1998 "Summer Conference on Public Relations Education."

Recommendations for Undergraduate Education

The Commission recommends that students graduating with undergraduate degrees possess both knowledge (what graduates should know and understand) and skills (areas of competence necessary to enter the profession).

Necessary knowledge includes;

- o communication and persuasion concepts and strategies
- o communication and public relations theories
- o relationships and relationship building
- o societal trends
- o ethical issues
- o legal requirements and issues
- o marketing and finance
- o public relations history
- o uses of research and forecasting
- o multicultural and global issues
- o organizational change and development
- o management concepts and theories

Necessary skills include:

- o Research Methods and Analysis

- o Management of Information
- o Mastery of Language in Written and Oral Communication
- o Problem Solving and Negotiation
- o Management of Communication
- o Strategic Planning
- o Issues Management
- o Audience Segmentation
- o Informative and Persuasive Writing
- o Community Relations, Consumer Relations, Employee Relations, other Practice Areas
- o Technological and Visual Literacy
- o Managing People, Programs and Resources
- o Sensitive Interpersonal Communication
- o Fluency in a Foreign Language
- o Ethical Decision-Making
- o Participation in the Professional Public Relations Community
- o Message Production
- o Working with a Current Issue
- o Public Speaking and Presentation
- o Applying Cross-Cultural and Cross-Gender Sensitivity

The Commission recommends that the undergraduate public relations curriculum be grounded in a strong traditional liberal arts and social science education. A minimum of five courses should be required in the major. Coursework in public relations should comprise 25 to 40 percent of all credit hours, with at least half of these courses clearly identified as public relations courses — the remaining 60 to 75 percent in liberal arts, social sciences, business and language courses.

The Commission strongly encourages a minor or double major in the liberal arts, social sciences or business.

The ideal undergraduate major in public relations would include these courses:

- o Introduction to Public Relations
- o Case Studies in Public Relations
- o Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation
- o Public Relations Writing and Production
- o Public Relations Planning and Management
- o Public Relations Campaigns
- o Supervised Work Experience in Public Relations (internship)
- o Directed electives

Realizing that many if not most academic programs would find it difficult to offer seven courses devoted entirely to public relations, the Commission concludes that the topics of the courses listed above are the essence of a quality public relations education. The Commission acknowledges that two or more of these topics might be combined into one course or that they might be taught in courses that also address other topics.

If public relations is offered as an undergraduate emphasis or focus rather than as a full major, the Commission recommends these courses:

- o Introduction to Public Relations
- o Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation
- o Public Relations Writing and Production
- o Supervised Work Experience in Public Relations (internship)

Recommendations for Graduate Education

The Commission recommends that students studying for master's degrees in public relations learn and appreciate the role of public relations as part of the management team, and learn relevant management and communications competencies and the skills needed to build effective relationships between organizations and their publics. Master's degree students should, says the Commission, gain advanced knowledge and understanding of the body of knowledge in public relations as well as theory, research, communication processes, planning, production and advanced communications management abilities.

The Commission recommends that the curriculum for a master's degree in public relations be a program of 30 to 36 credit hours. Students should master these content areas at a level beyond that expected of undergraduates:

- o Public Relations Theory
- o Public Relations Law
- o Public Relations Research Methods
- o Public Relations Management
- o Public Relations Programming and Production
- o Communication Processes
- o Management Sciences
- o Behavioral Sciences
- o Public Relations Ethics
- o A Public Relations Specialty
- o An Internship or Practicum Experience and/or Comprehensive Examinations
- o A Thesis with Comprehensive Examination and/or a Capstone Project

The Commission suggests these content areas in one sample 36-hour master's program :

- o Public Relations Theory
- o Public Relations Research
- o Public Relations Management
- o Public Relations Law
- o Integrated Communications
- o Accounting
- o Finance
- o Marketing
- o Strategic Planning

The Commission suggests these content areas in a second sample 30-hour program:

- o Research Methods in Communication
- o Research Design in Public Relations
- o Theories of Mass Communication
- o Seminar on Public Relations Management
- o Seminar on Public Relations Publics
- o Seminar on Ethics and Philosophy in Public Relations
- o two electives
- o a thesis

The Commission, noting that a doctoral degree is a theory and research degree, concludes that doctoral education should foster an awareness of not only the body of knowledge in public relations, but also the relationship of that body of knowledge to those of other communication-related bodies of knowledge. Doctoral students also should be expected to demonstrate awareness of the breadth and depth of disciplines that influence, and are influenced by, public relations and to be able to integrate that in their teaching and research. Finally, doctoral students should be prepared to develop and contribute to the public relations body of knowledge through formal quantitative and qualitative research, and to foster the development of competing paradigms of public relations based on differing theoretical and philosophical foundations.

The Commission recommends that the core curriculum of a doctoral program, either one focusing exclusively on public relations or the more common variant that includes public relations as part of a broader mass communication or communication doctorate, include courses in:

- o Communication Theory
- o Philosophy of Science
- o Research Methods
- o Statistical and Qualitative Research Tools
- o Specialized Seminars in Public Relations
- o Specialized Seminars in Related Social, Behavioral and Business Sciences
- o Dissertation Research

The Commission also recommends that doctoral programs prepare their students to teach by involving them in the classroom and developing their teaching skills.

Recommendations for Continuing Education

Acknowledging that many professional organizations and private vendors offer workshops and seminars that are legitimate continuing education opportunities, the Commission focused its discussion of continuing education, however, on continuing education offered for academic credit or as part of a certificate program.

Continuing education courses pegged to students at a level of ability similar to that of an undergraduate (such as an individual with little or no public relations training or experience) might do well to follow its recommendations for undergraduate education, the Commission suggests. Similarly, graduate-level continuing education might adopt the Commission's recommendations for graduate education.

Continuing education lends itself especially well to distance education (any instruction that takes place with the instructor and student physically separated from each other). For that reason, the Commission notes that a greater variety of teaching methods and technologies may be appropriate in continuing education courses. The resources needed to offer distance education and the special training and preparation demanded of instructors also are special considerations for those offering continuing education courses.

Recommendations for Teaching Methods

The Commission enumerates more than a dozen different ways in which instructors can deliver instruction to students, ranging from traditional lectures to simulations, games and the use of small-group projects.

The Commission also identifies a number of instructional media, assignments and in-class activities that can create a bridge between theory and practice.

Recommendations for Evaluation

The Commission identifies normative, formative and summative assessment tools and techniques that can be used to determine whether students have learned what their academic program intended. Techniques range from required entrance or exit examinations to internship performance to capstone courses to portfolio review.

The Commission notes that all academic programs should practice self-assessment of their effectiveness by means such as examining student evaluations, faculty-student ratios, placement and graduate school admission rates, alumni and employer satisfaction and input of advisory boards.

In addition, the Commission recommends that public relations programs seek external review from one of three available sources: the certification program of the Public Relations Society of America (available to all public relations programs), the National Communication Association (available to public relations programs in communication colleges, schools or departments) and the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (available to public relations programs in journalism and mass communications colleges, schools or departments).

Recommendations for Faculty Qualifications

The Commission suggests that both academic and professional credentials and experience are important qualifications for public relations faculty. While the ideal full-time faculty member is an individual with both the academic credential of a terminal degree (usually a Ph.D.) and the professional credential of significant work experience in public relations, the Commission concludes that it is more realistic for programs to have among their full-time public relations faculty a balance of those with terminal degrees and those without terminal degrees whose professional experience is significant and substantial.

Adjunct faculty should have at least an undergraduate degree and professional public relations experience, the Commission notes, and suggests that accreditation or certification of adjuncts is highly desirable.

The Commission recommends that both full-time and part-time faculty be active participants in professional and/or academic associations and that both be contributing to the public relations body of knowledge through scholarship and professional or creative activity.

The Commission repeats a recommendation from the 1987 Commission report: "Public relations courses should not be taught by people who have little or no experience and interest in the field and have no academic preparation in public relations."

Recommendations for Resources to Support Public Relations Programs

The Commission urged that public relations students have the same access to both faculty and resources as students in other academic programs in the academic unit where public relations is taught.

Workloads of public relations faculty, the Commission recommends, should reflect the full range of responsibilities assigned to them: teaching, advising, research, service, administrative assignments and the supervision or advising of students organizations such as the Public Relations Student Society of America.

The Commission notes specifically that public relations education requires these administrative and financial resources:

- o personnel: faculty, both full-time and part-time, paid commensurably
- o staff support
- o equipment and facilities in classrooms, labs and faculty offices
- o travel and professional development funding
- o operating support, such as telephone, FAX and photocopying capability
- o library materials to inform both teaching and research

Identification of Global Implications

The Commission identifies seven factors that, regardless of nation or culture, can be considered to have an impact on public relations education. The impact will, of course, differ from culture to culture. The factors are:

- o cultural values and beliefs
- o laws and public policies
- o external groups, organizations and associations
- o organizational factors
- o small group factors within an institution
- o interpersonal factors within an institution
- o intrapersonal factors within individuals

The Commission's Call to Action

The Commission concludes with a series of seven recommendations for interaction between public relations education and the professional practice of public relations:

1. Public relations practitioners should take a new look at the "products" of today's public relations education, for they are likely to be impressed with the breadth and depth of knowledge and skill students bring to internships and entry-level employment.
2. There is a great need for significantly increased support from practitioners for accreditation/certification of public relations programs, particularly through attaining additional representation of public relations organizations on the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications.
3. The practice should establish additional endowed chairs in public relations at academic institutions with outstanding public relations programs.
4. Successful individual public relations professionals should consider making significant contributions to public relations programs.
5. Public relations educators and professionals can advance the appreciation of the field among influentials and the general public by jointly developing and participating in projects of topical and long-term social significance.
6. Joint research projects, administered by educators and funded by the practice, can not only advance the educator-practitioner relationship but also expand the public relations body of knowledge.
7. "Traditional" support programs for public relations educators, their students and their programs — scholarships, paid internships, support of PRSSA and faculty enrichment programs — must be redoubled.

2. Background

The Practice

While its roots can be traced to ancient civilizations, the emergence of public relations as a profession is essentially a twentieth century phenomenon. Immediately following World War II, pent-up demand for consumer goods and services exploded in the United States, triggering a parallel demand for public relations, primarily in the form of publicity support for sales and marketing efforts.

Few practitioners in the late '40s and '50s had studied this evolving practice. Since only a handful of colleges and universities offered formal courses in public relations, the industry reached out to men and women experienced in writing for newspapers and magazines, most having studied journalism. These professionals turned their skills toward a kind of "in-house journalism" for corporations or toward roles as publicists and promoters for clients. By

1950, an estimated 17,000 men and 2,000 women were employed in these endeavors.

Responding to the needs of their employers and clients, public relations practitioners began to expand their activity into such areas as financial relations (annual reports, shareholder meetings and presentations to the financial community) and internal communications (publications, special events and awards programs) to support efforts to enhance employee productivity and commitment.

During the 1960s, social issues and problems forced government, business, labor and other powerful organizations to act and react, creating new public relations emphases on community relations, consumer relations, social responsibility programs and research and analysis to identify issues which could affect the progress and survival of an organization. In this changing, confrontational and contentious era, public relations practitioners were expected to plan for, and manage, crises. Public relations communication itself evolved from one-way message delivery into a two-way exchange involving listening to publics; assessing their needs, expectations and demands; resolving conflicts between groups, and affecting public opinion and behavior.

In recent years, public relations professionals have moved toward an emphasis on building and maintaining relationships and on becoming skilled, active counselors at management's decision-making table. Driving this latest evolutionary movement are influential societal trends: global business operations; mergers, acquisitions and consolidations; the empowerment of public opinion within the global village; segmented, fragmented audiences; the information explosion that has led to uncontrolled, gateless dissemination of messages; increasing government regulation and oversight; issues of diversity and multiculturalism in the workplace, marketplace and town hall, and the introduction of technology, including automation and computerization.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that public relations is one of the fastest growing professional fields in the country, and that growth trend is mirrored in other countries as well.

Formal Study in Public Relations

Recognizing a lively and promising career market for their students, colleges and universities began to offer formal education for public relations. In the early 1950s, about a dozen schools offered public relations programs. In 1969 the Public Relations Society of America began to charter student chapters at colleges and universities; initially there were 14, all agreeing to offer at least two courses in public relations.

In 1975, the first Commission on Public Relations Education, comprised of eight educators and practitioners, was formed by PRSA to develop guidelines for public relations education. One of the Commission's primary recommendations was that programs offer at least 12 semester hours, the equivalent of four courses, in public relations at the undergraduate level. Thus, four courses became the new requirement for chartering chapters of the burgeoning Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).

The 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education deliberated three years before issuing updated guidelines. Its 25 members represented such communications organizations as PRSA and its Educators Section (now the Educators Academy); the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC); the American Management Association; the American Marketing Association; the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education (now the Institute for Public Relations); the International Communication Association (ICA); the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association, NCA), and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).

One of the primary recommendations of this 1987 Commission was a sequence of 15 semester hours, the equivalent of five courses, in formal public relations study for undergraduates. This also became the requirement for PRSSA chapters. Today there are 214 PRSSA chapters at colleges and universities.

Graduate curricula recommendations were addressed by PRSA commissions in 1990 and 1995 as more schools added advanced programs to their offerings. Today approximately 70 schools offer master's degrees or a graduate emphasis in public relations. Four universities offer doctoral programs specifically in public relations, with the majority of their graduates seeking careers in teaching and academic research.

The 1999 Commission and Its Process

The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education was comprised of 47 educators and practitioners representing a consortium of eight allied communications organizations: PRSA and its Educators Academy; the Institute for Public Relations; NCA; AEJMC; the Association for Women in Communication (formerly Women in Communication, Inc.); IABC; the International Communications Association; and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). PRSA served as the coordinating organization and a staff member served as an ex officio member of the Commission. (Members are listed in Appendix A.)

While many academic programs in public relations are housed in departments or schools of journalism and mass communication, an increasing number — almost half — are now in departments or schools of communication, a discipline which has its roots in rhetoric, interpersonal communication and persuasion. As a result, NCA, the leading U.S. academic society in communication, played a pivotal role in the Commission's work. In 1998, NCA sponsored a summer conference on public relations education, which drew, in part, on an extensive, jointly-sponsored survey of educators and practitioners seeking their views on public relations education. Deliberations and discussions at that NCA conference helped guide the final recommendations of the Commission.

The Commission conducted its work through called meetings, through conferences such as this NCA event; through open discussion sessions during annual meetings of its allied groups and through correspondence, conference calls and exchange of information over the Internet.

The Commission's final report was introduced at the October 1999 International Conference of PRSA in Anaheim, CA. The report also has been presented to all other organizations represented on the Commission and is being widely distributed to schools, educators and practitioners in the United States and around the world.

3. Vision and Purpose

In the future, public relations professionals will not only be skilled communicators but leaders who will help their organizations build and maintain relationships with strategic publics. They will fulfill dual roles of managing communication and counseling top management. Excellent public relations education will be the foundation for preparing new professionals for this dual responsibility

Therefore, it is important that public relations education grow in sophistication throughout the 21st Century. Public relations as an academic discipline should be equal in status to professionally-oriented academic programs in journalism, marketing, advertising, law and medicine. Academic programs at the graduate level may become comparable in length, complexity and intensity as MBA programs. Faculties for public relations programs may be increasingly interdisciplinary, representing not only a diversity of communications backgrounds but also diversity in academic degrees. Public relations programs may require greater structural and decision-making autonomy.

From the outset, the 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education saw its purpose as determining curricular guidelines and recommendations that will prepare students at all levels of education — undergraduate, graduate and continuing — for the professional challenges of the 21st century. Throughout its two years of study and planning, the Commission diligently sought to fulfill that purpose. Its work reflected the commitment of both educators and practitioners alike to the fundamental responsibility of public relations to build understanding, credibility and trust between organizations and their publics in democratic societies that now are linked globally.

4. Mission and Goals

The mission of the 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education was to provide guidelines, recommendations and standards for public relations education — undergraduate, graduate and continuing — for the early 21st century. Specific concerns of the Commission were desired student outcomes (what students should know or be able to do as a result of their public relations education), curriculum, pedagogy (teaching methods) and assessment of both student learning and academic programs in public relations.

The Commission set six goals.

Goal 1 Determine needs for public relations education in a technological, multicultural and global society.

Goal 2 Recommend outcomes for public relations education at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Goal 3 Recommend curricula for undergraduate and graduate education.

Goal 4 Recommend characteristics of appropriate academic "homes" for public relations education.

Goal 5 Recommend required faculty credentials for public relations educators at the pre-professional level and in continuing education, and provide criteria for evaluating faculty.

Goal 6 Identify minimal and desired resources for public relations education, and provide criteria for evaluating resources.

5. The Commission's Assumptions

The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education was guided by 12 assumptions on which its members reached consensus.

1. The ethical practice of public relations is the context in which and for which education must occur.
2. Public relations helps organizations and publics adapt to each other.
3. Public relations education requires an interdisciplinary foundation that includes liberal arts, languages, social sciences and management.
4. Public relations communication is a two-way process influencing attitudes, behavior and relationships.
5. Graduates of public relations programs should be passionate about the profession, responsible self-managers, flexible in attitude, team participants and ethical leaders appreciative of cultural diversity and the global society.
6. Students must be prepared to operate in a multicultural environment.
7. Public relations education is a continuum that goes beyond undergraduate education to include graduate studies, professional development and continuing education.
8. Public relations educators have an obligation to seek professional refresher experience, and practitioners have a responsibility to support and provide opportunities for educators to retool.
9. Practitioners have a significant responsibility to support and participate in undergraduate and graduate public relations education.
10. In the coming years, the teaching of public relations will be significantly affected by new technologies and methods such as "distance learning."
11. Effective preparation of public relations practitioners will not be accomplished by curriculum content alone, but only when content is provided by competent instructors, when it is supplemented by hands-on experience and when it is subject to evaluation.
12. Public relations practitioners and educators should be leaders in building understanding that public relations has a fundamental responsibility to society and adds value to society.

6. Research Conducted by the Commission

The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education relied heavily on the findings of the largest and most comprehensive survey ever undertaken on public relations education. The study was co-sponsored by the Commission and the National Communication Association as part of NCA's 1998 "Summer Conference on Public Relations Education." Funding was contributed by PRSA and the University of Miami's School of Communication.

The three goals of the study were to: a) report what skills, knowledge and concepts practitioners and educators think are currently being taught in public relations curricula; b) compare these with what educators and practitioners think should be taught; and c) document the level of agreement between practitioners and academics as to what is taught and what should be taught. More than 100 academics and practitioners used the results of this study in the four-day NCA conference as the basis for making recommendations for public relations curricula in four types of academic programs: a) undergraduate programs based in journalism/mass communication units, b) undergraduate programs based in communication/rhetoric units, c) professional master's programs, and d) theory-based master's and doctoral programs. Those recommendations weighed heavily in the Commission's work.

Questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of 564 educators and 748 practitioners, yielding a sample of 1312. Questions addressed both existing and desired student outcomes (skills and knowledge of graduates), curriculum (course content), pedagogy (teaching methods), and assessment (measuring what has been learned). The response rate ranged from 30 percent for academics to 12 percent for practitioners. While low, the overall response rate of 20 percent is within expected parameters for a questionnaire of this type and length when using a national random sample composed largely of practitioners.

The most significant conclusions of the study were:

Outcomes

Practitioners and educators strongly agree that current public relations education is on track. Students are learning what they should and what they need.

Consistent with those generally positive feelings about public relations education, only 19.8 percent of educators and 14.4 percent of practitioners disagree or strongly disagree that "PR education is keeping up with current trends in the profession."

Practitioners also value public relations graduates, with only 18.1 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that "Most PR practitioners have very positive attitude toward PR college graduates." One in five educators (20.8 percent) disagreed with the statement.

Practitioners and academics generally agreed on 24 desirable skills/attitudes for entry level employees. The most highly desired skill was writing news releases* (practitioner mean = 6.47, educator mean = 6.77, with 7 being "highly desired.") Second most desired skill was being a self starter (practitioner M = 6.33, educator M = 6.60), and the third most desired skill was critical thinking and problem solving (practitioner M = 6.49, educator M = 6.63).

It is significant that educators saw 18 of the desirable 24 skills/attitudes with a rating of 6 or greater as even more desirable than did practitioners.

On the whole, practitioners and academics also agree that they are not satisfied that desirable skills/knowledge are actually found in graduates, with only three — good attitude, word processing/E-mail, and typing skill — scoring above 5 on the 7-point scale. Although the data is by no means definitive, survey results indicate public relations educators may be focusing too much on mechanical skills (e.g., typing and word processing) and not enough on the half dozen entry level skills that are more important in the eyes of practitioners: being a self starter (M = 6.61), writing news releases (M = 6.53), critical thinking and problem solving skills (M = 6.49), and flexibility (M = 6.44).

The six most highly valued content areas that can be taught in a public relations curriculum, with their overall mean score on the 7 point scale, were: planning, writing, producing and delivering print communication to audiences (M = 6.51), setting goals/objectives/strategic planning (M = 6.49), ethical and legal credibility (M = 6.42), audience segmentation (M = 6.37), publicity and media relations (M = 6.35), and problem/opportunity analysis (M = 6.33).

Practitioners and educators were in noticeably close agreement on conceptual content of public relations education, with no differences exceeding one-half point on the 1-7 scale. Only one item of the 89 communication theory/concepts/models items had a difference of 0.50 or more between practitioners (M = 5.62) and educators (M = 6.12), with both valuing the area, but educators valuing it more. Another nine items had a difference of 0.40 between practitioners and educators, with the three most valued — audience segmentation, public opinion polls and surveys, and research design/process/techniques — being valued by both, with educators again valuing them more.

Practitioners and educators share far more working experience than most think. Practitioner respondents averaged 17.42 years of experience, while those teaching public relations averaged 10.35 years of professional experience and 7.79 years in their present teaching position.

PRSA's accreditation program is accepted and credible among educators more so than among practitioners; only 27.7 percent of practitioner respondents held the APR, while 36 percent of educator respondents are APR.

Assessment

Both educators and practitioners were in general agreement that assessment of student learning was important, that it should be done systematically and that it should include measures other than classroom forms of assessment. Educators placed more emphasis on systematic evaluation, informal assessment techniques and specific outcome assessment than did practitioners; practitioners placed more emphasis on portfolio assessment, inclusion of area professionals in the process and annual student assessment.

Only internships as an assessment technique were rated 6.00 or higher among the 19 assessment techniques listed.

Educators were asked to report on their program assessment plans; fewer than half reported having assessment plans in place for their programs and even fewer (30 percent) reported having student assessment programs in place.

While more than three-quarters of the practitioners reported they participated in hiring decisions, fewer than a quarter had actually been asked to participate in the assessment of undergraduate or graduate public relations programs or students.

Curriculum

Educators and practitioners were in general agreement with how the public relations curriculum should look. Respondents organized the public relations curriculum around these areas: evaluation/measurement, specialty areas, photography/filmmaking, persuasion and propaganda, departments/firms/careers, research, political public relations, ethics, general social sciences, publicity, information technology, mass communication, special events, and principles of public relations.

Educators and practitioners differed on only 5 of 90 items, with practitioners seeing courses in journalism, radio/TV/film, and filmmaking as more essential than educators and educators seeing courses in communication theory/models and graphic design more essential than practitioners.

When asked what the purpose of an undergraduate major and minor in public relations should be, the majority of respondents said the major prepared the student for an entry-level job in public relations; the minor laid a foundation of public relations skills for students in other majors who might work in the field. The master's degree was seen in two ways, first as a way for practitioners to move into management and second as a way to better understand theory and research as applied to the profession. The doctorate in public relations was seen basically as providing entry to teaching public relations and as a means of advancing the theoretical base of the profession.

Teaching and Pedagogy

Respondents who taught either full or part time reported access to most teaching resources, with the exception of on-line research services (e.g., Lexis/Nexis), satellite links, access time to cable TV and specialized tutors (e.g., research, statistics, writing).

Two-thirds of the respondents reported using the Web or Internet for class use, primarily as supplemental resource links or for class assignments. Nevertheless, data suggested that public relations educators, while having access to both rudimentary and advanced media, still rely primarily on rudimentary media: videotapes, handouts and use of whiteboards or chalkboards.

Almost half of the respondents reported teaching "introduction to public relations," followed closely by writing/techniques classes (14.6 percent) and campaigns classes (12.8 percent). Most often classes were small (20-25 students).

When specific instructional techniques were compared between educators and practitioners who taught part time, only five differences emerged: practitioners reported greater use of lectures, guest lecturers, individual presentations/speeches, case studies and running complete campaigns than full-time educators.

Demographics

The sample was balanced by sex (Males = 51.4 percent; Female = 48.1 percent). Respondents' average age was 48.04 (median = 48; mode = 50). The vast majority were Caucasian (84.5 percent) and held graduate degrees (77.4 percent, a function of the educator subsample). Most had majored in a communication-related major ; only 3.3 percent were business majors.

In terms of current position, half of the educators were assistant, associate or full professor, the other half lecturers or instructors. Practitioners reported being senior management (CEO, owner, partner, 19.4 percent), directors/managers (middle-level management, 19.4 percent), and "other" (technicians, account executives, etc., 61.2 percent).

Most of the practitioners reported never having taught part time. Almost two-thirds, however, reported lecturing to a public relations class. Over half reported supervising an intern over the last five years.

The full study is available on the National Communication Association's home page (www.natcom.org) and a condensed version was printed in the Spring 1999 issue of Public Relations Review.

7. Recommendations for Undergraduate Education

Purpose of an Undergraduate Degree

The purpose of an undergraduate degree in public relations is to prepare students for an entry-level position in public relations and to assume a leadership role over the course of their careers in advancing the profession and professionally representing their employers. Students must be educated broadly in the liberal arts and sciences, and specifically in public relations, so that they are fully employable upon graduation.

Desired Outcomes

Specific educational outcomes are categorized as knowledge and skills. Knowledge outcomes identify what graduates should know and understand; skill outcomes address the areas of skill and competence necessary to enter the profession.

Like any other advanced professional field, public relations needs as its practitioners individuals with high ethical standards and a passion for their profession. Graduates should be responsible, flexible and professionally oriented self-managers. They should be curious, conceptual thinkers and appreciative of cultural and gender diversity and of global cultures. They must be trustworthy team participants and leaders, and good communicators.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of public relations and the realities of its practice in society, it is important for graduates to be grounded in disciplines beyond journalism, communications and public relations. For that reason, the best preparation for the profession would include a minor or double major in a related area. It is expected that graduating students would be able to integrate the preceding professional attributes and demonstrate familiarity and comfort with the knowledge and skills that follow.

Knowledge

Undergraduate majors should master the following knowledge:

- o Communication and persuasion concepts and strategies including mass media, organizational, small group and interpersonal channels of communication
- o Communication and public relations theory, including public relations' role in society and in an organization
- o Relationships and relationship building
- o Societal trends
- o Ethical issues
- o Legal requirements and issues
- o Marketing and finance
- o Public relations history
- o Uses of research and forecasting
- o Multicultural and global issues
- o Organizational change and development
- o Management concepts and theories

Skills

Undergraduates should be competent in the following skills:

- o Research, including methods, analysis, recommendations, reporting, environmental and social assessment and statistics
- o Management of information including its role in the public relations process and assessment of message credibility
- o Mastery of language in written and oral communication
- o Problem solving and negotiation
- o Management of communication
- o Strategic planning
- o Issues management, including environmental scanning, issue anticipation, risk analysis and change methodology
- o Audience segmentation
- o Informative and persuasive writing for various audiences
- o Area emphases such as community relations, consumer relations, investor relations, employee relations, government relations, and media relations
- o Technology and visual literacy (including the Internet and desktop publishing), and development of new media/message strategies and the design and layout of messages
- o Managing people, programs and resources
- o Sensitive interpersonal communication
- o Fluency in a second language
- o Ethical decision-making
- o Participation in the professional public relations community
- o Writing and production of specific communication messages
- o Working within a current issue environment
- o Public speaking and presentation
- o Applying cross-cultural and cross-gender sensitivity

Curriculum

Because educational institutions are so diverse in their structures and organization, the Commission felt it more appropriate to address the content of curriculum rather than to proscribe specific courses. The content may be contained in various courses both internal and external to public relations programs and their curricula.

Sample curriculum configurations, to be used as guidelines only, follow these content recommendations.

In any case, a strong traditional liberal arts and social science education is a necessary foundation for public relations education. It also is requisite that a multicultural and global perspective pervades the curriculum, and that public relations be taught within the framework of ethical issues and behavior.

Coursework in a public relations major should comprise 25 to 40 percent of all undergraduate credit hours. Of those, at least half should be clearly identified as public relations courses.

Five clearly identifiable public relations courses should be the minimum, and programs should move to include more than five if at all possible.

A student's program of study should be comprised 60 to 75 percent of liberal arts, social science, business and language courses.

The student's program of study should include a minor or double major in another discipline. Especially suggested are business and the behavioral sciences.

Content

The following topics are all deemed essential to a strong undergraduate education in public relations, regardless of the course(s) in which they may be taught:

Theory, Origin, Principles and Professional Practice of Public Relations:

Content in this area specifically pertains to the nature and role of public relations, the history of public relations, the societal forces affecting the profession and its practice and theories of public relations. Also included are practitioner qualifications (including education and training), responsibilities and duties, functioning of public relations departments and counseling firms, and career-long professional development. Addressed here as well are specializations in public relations such as community relations, employee relations, consumer relations, financial and investor relations, governmental relations, public affairs and lobbying, fund raising and membership development, international public relations, and publicity and media relations.

Public Relations Ethics and Law:

Content here includes codes of ethics and practice in public relations and in other professions; specific legal issues such as privacy, defamation, copyright, product liability, and financial disclosure; legal and regulatory compliance, and credibility.

Public Relations Research, Measurement and Performance Evaluation:

Content should address both quantitative and qualitative research designs, processes and techniques including public opinion polling and survey research; experimental design and research; fact-finding and applied research; observation and performance measurement; social, communication and employee audits; issue tracking; focus groups and interviews; use of external research services and consultants; media and clipping analysis, and historical research. It should also focus on results-based decision making, measuring program effectiveness, measuring staff and counselor performance, developing criteria for performance, tools and methods for measurement and evaluation and reporting on results of public relations efforts.

Public Relations Planning and Management:

Content of the curriculum in planning and management should be theory, techniques and models related to setting long- and short-term goals and objectives, designing strategies and tactics, segmenting audiences, analyzing problems and opportunities, communicating with top management, developing budgets, contingency planning for crises and disasters, managing issues, developing timetables and calendars and assigning authority and responsibility. This content area also requires inclusion of the philosophy and culture of organizations, and knowledge of business or corporate culture including finance, theory, practice and terminology.

Public Relations Writing and Production:

Public relations writing is an essential, discrete skill not addressed in journalistic writing, composition or creative writing. Content here should address communication theory; concepts and models for both mass, interpersonal, employee and internal communication; organizational communication and dynamics; persuasion and propaganda; controlled versus uncontrolled communication, and feedback systems. It must include development of competency in such skills as layout and graphics, speechwriting and delivery, spokesperson training, speakers bureaus, corporate identity, photography, filmmaking and working with outside suppliers. It requires a solid understanding of media, media channels and the societal role of media. It includes message strategy and delivery (i.e., planning, writing, producing and delivering print communication to audiences; and planning, writing, producing and delivering audiovisual, electronic, videotape and multimedia communication to audiences). It also is essential that content address new public relations tools and techniques, especially current and emerging technology and its application in the practice of public relations.

Public Relations Action and Implementation:

This area of content includes actual implementation of campaigns; continuing programs (product publicity, safety, etc.); crises and isolated incidents; individual activities of practitioners and firms, clients or employers; meetings and workshops, and special events.

Supervised Work Experience in Public Relations:

It is imperative that public relations students have the opportunity to apply the skills and principles they learn to the professional arena. These practical experiences must be supervised by faculty and practitioners who cooperate to provide professional experience directed by learning objectives and assessed throughout to assure a quality practical educational experience.

Disciplines Related to Public Relations:

Supporting disciplines appropriate to public relations programs include political communication, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, rhetorical communication, small group communication, psychology, sociology, marketing, management and organizational behavior, finance, journalism, radio and television production, advertising, mass communication law, photography, filmmaking, art, design and graphics, information technology, hypertext and Web design.

Directed Electives:

Certain content in other disciplines should be considered essential for the development and preparation of public relations professionals. It is recommended that such content be recommended or directed as elective courses to supplement the core public relations and communication courses. Recommended directed electives include: business management and marketing, accounting, finance, economics, consumer behavior, political science and the political system, public administration, social psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, English and English writing, political science, including government and political campaigns, and international business and communication.

Sample Content Configuration

As the practice of public relations becomes increasingly sophisticated, more institutions of higher learning will begin to define majors, rather than just sequences or emphases of study, in public relations. Given this projection, the Commission identified a sample curriculum following the above content recommendations for a bachelor's degree in public relations. Following is a recommendation for a minimum acceptable array of courses for a major in public relations with supplementary courses within the broader major and minor.

Ideally, an undergraduate degree in public relations would include these courses:

- o Introduction to Public Relations (including theory, origin and principles)
- o Case Studies in Public Relations that review the professional practice
- o Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation
- o Public Relations Law and Ethics
- o Public Relations Writing and Production
- o Public Relations Planning and Management
- o Public Relations Campaigns
- o Supervised Work Experience in Public Relations
- o Directed Electives

In a program where public relations is an emphasis or focus, integrated with related disciplines such as communication or journalism to form a major, some of this content may be included in courses with content that is

broader than public relations alone. In these instances, the Commission recommends, as a minimum, that the public relations emphasis or focus include these courses::

- o Introduction to Public Relations (including theory, origin and principles)
- o Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation
- o Public Relations Writing and Production
- o Supervised Work Experience in Public Relations
- o At least one additional public relations course in law and ethics, public relations planning and management case studies or campaigns

Programs that offer minors should make it clear that a minor in public relations is not sufficient to prepare a student for the professional practice of public relations. However, programs may offer minors in public relations to enhance the understanding of students majoring in professional disciplines that use or cooperate with public relations. A minor in public relations should specifically address the knowledge outcomes previously stated rather than just the skill outcomes.

8. Recommendations for Graduate Education

Purpose of a Master's Degree

The purpose of a master's degree is to enable students to acquire advanced skills and knowledge in research, management, problem solving and issues, and to obtain management level expertise. For some students, the master's degree also is preparation for doctoral level education.

The master's degree program thus prepares individuals for public relations management leadership, career development and on-going contributions to the profession and to society in a global context. It guides the individual in knowing and appreciating the role of public relations as part of the management team, in gaining relevant management and communications competencies and in building effective relationships between organizations and their publics.

Desired Outcomes of a Master's Degree

Master's students should gain advanced knowledge and understanding of the body of knowledge in public relations, including theory, research, communication processes, planning, production and advanced communications management abilities.

Students should be taught within an environment in which they learn to provide leadership through use of communication, social and behavioral science theory and research techniques to help organizations analyze and solve problems and take advantage of opportunities that have public relations consequences.

To enter a master's degree program, individuals should hold an undergraduate degree in public relations or its equivalent: i.e., a combination of an undergraduate communications degree and public relations experience. Individuals with undergraduate degrees in other fields without public relations knowledge and competencies should be required to demonstrate proficiencies such as those listed in the undergraduate section of this report. Options could be provided to prepare new students for advanced study and/or to build upon their current competencies to the point they are ready for graduate-level study of public relations.

The Master's Degree Curriculum

The curriculum for the master's level graduate student must have a great deal of flexibility. It should be tailored to graduate student career objectives and personal interests. While many students will choose a master's degree as their final degree, the master's curriculum should be able to prepare students who so desire to enter doctoral programs (e.g., by choosing a specific set of courses and/or completing a thesis).

The basic curriculum of the master's degree in public relations should be a program of study requiring between 30 to 36 credit hours of graduate coursework.

The Curriculum Composition

The following content areas should provide advanced, intensive focus upon the primary area of interest: public relations. All that has come before, through general education and public relations studies, will be here. The expectation is that students will develop further abilities to critically analyze and synthesize the body of knowledge in public relations management by producing critical essays and original research projects, and will enhance their professional performance through the application of theory and research.

The student should master the following content areas beyond the undergraduate competencies.

Public Relations Theory:

This area should familiarize students with the leading theories of public relations scholarship, including social science, rhetorical and communication theories (i.e., models of public relations, public relations roles theories, theories of publics, theories of public relationships), public relations history, and public relations issues (encroachment, feminization of the field, paradigm struggle, impact of social, political, and economic environments).

Public Relations Law:

This area should address regulatory, constitutional and statutory laws of public relations, risks of free expression and communications law related to public relations.

Public Relations Research Methods:

This area should include the application of social science research methods to the planning, implementation and evaluation issues of public relations practice. Quantitative and qualitative methods, an understanding of experimental design, sampling, use of standard statistical packages, report writing and research ethics should be taught.

Public Relations Management:

This area should include public relations strategic management principles and issues (e.g., planning, organizing, evaluating, staffing, counseling, leadership, budgeting principles and such advanced subjects as reputation management), concepts of organizational effectiveness (strategy, size, technology, environment and the dominant coalition), public relations as a political process and how it is related to other functions such as integrated communications and to the mission of the organization, rhetorical-critical approaches; culture and globalization; building relationships with internal and external audiences; issues and crisis management; activism, mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

Public Relations Programming and Production:

This area should include advanced programming and production principles, particularly related to new technology, the Internet and telecommunications as well as the practices and theories of message preparation, visual communications principles, and other communications techniques. Students should apply research and evaluation models to this practical side of public relations.

Communication Processes:

Here students should learn theories and practices of communication (organization, interpersonal, small group, mass, persuasion, rhetorical, conflict resolution).

Management Sciences:

This area should include accounting, finance, marketing and integrated marketing/advertising communication applicable to both for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Behavioral Sciences:

This area should acquaint students with social psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology and political science. It should also include courses that build an understanding of group behavior, global trends, evolving global codes of conduct, organizational culture, behavioral change and knowledge of local, state, national and international political systems.

Public Relations Ethics:

Some of the ethical issues that merit attention are philosophical principles, international ethical issues, concealment vs. disclosure, divided loyalties, social responsibility, accountability, professionalism, codes of ethics, whistleblowing, confidentiality, ethical dealing with the media, solicitation of new business, ethics of research, logical arguments and multicultural and gender diversity.

Public Relations Specialty Options:

Internship or Practicum Experience and/or Comprehensive Examination

Thesis and/or Comprehensive Exam and/or Capstone Project

The graduate student should be required to conduct some original research in her/his particular area of interest, resulting in a thesis or graduate capstone project of acceptable quality. If a thesis is optional, the student should be required to take a comprehensive examination. It is recommended that no credit hours be awarded for comprehensive examinations.

One Sample Master's Program Content Outline (36 credit hours)

Public Relations Content

- o Public Relations Theory
- o Public Relations Research
- o Public Relations Management
- o Public Relations Law
- o Integrated Communications

Management Science Area Content

- o Accounting
- o Finance
- o Marketing
- o Strategic Planning

When the Master's Degree is Terminal:

- o Leadership Studies (New Technologies, Conflict Resolution, International Relations)
- o Capstone Project

When the Master's Degree is Preparation for the Doctorate:

- o Thesis

An Alternative Sample Master's Program Content Outline (30 credit hours)

- o Research Methods in Communication
- o Research Design in Public Relations
- o Theories of Mass Communication
- o Seminar on Public Relations Management
- o Seminar on Public Relations Publics
- o Seminar on Ethics and Philosophy in Public Relations
- o Seminar on Global Public Relations
- o Two Electives
- o Master's Thesis (6 credits)

The Purpose of a Doctoral Degree

A doctoral degree in public relations is a theory and research degree. The purpose of the Ph.D. program is to help students develop the theoretical and research skills they will need to add to the body of public relations knowledge.

A doctoral degree should prepare graduates for academic positions in universities and for advanced management and applied research positions in major public relations departments, opinion research companies and other organizations.

Historically, the doctoral curriculum in public relations has been a specialized option within a broader Ph.D. program, usually titled "mass communication" or "communication."

But communications Ph.D. programs have not produced a sufficient supply of graduates with a public relations specialty, primarily because few educators with an interest in researching public relations problems have been involved in those Ph.D. programs. The result has been a shortage of public relations researchers. The addition of public relations researchers to university faculties would render the existing framework of most Ph.D. programs adequate for a public relations specialty.

Desired Outcomes of a Doctoral Degree

Students completing a doctoral program should be:

- o prepared for roles as senior managers and as future college faculty who can deliver course content and evaluate student work effectively.
- o aware of not only the body of knowledge in public relations, but the relationship of that body of knowledge to those of other communication-related (e.g., interpersonal, rhetorical, organizational and small group) bodies of knowledge as well. In addition, students should demonstrate awareness of the breadth and depth of disciplines that influence, or are influenced by, public relations and ability to integrate that knowledge in their teaching and research.
- o prepared to develop and contribute to the body of knowledge through formal quantitative and qualitative research and to develop the ability to disseminate that information to the academic and practitioner communities in a clear, usable fashion through conferences and professional publications.
- o prepared to develop competing paradigms of public relations based on differing metatheoretical and philosophical foundations in response to the maturation of the field.

Because doctoral programs are generally an array of courses tailored to the academic and professional backgrounds of individual students, it is expected that appropriate attention will be given in these individualized programs to ensuring a foundation in public relations concepts, theories and professional practices.

Curriculum

The core curriculum of most Ph.D. programs in communication or mass communication stresses research and theory building through courses in communication theory, philosophy of science, research methods and statistical and qualitative research tools.

A public relations Ph.D. candidate should also take the bulk of his or her coursework in these core areas of research skills. It is essential that the instructors of these core courses understand public relations, encourage new research on public relations problems and encourage the building of public relations theories. This has seldom been the case in current Ph.D. programs.

In addition, the Ph.D. program should offer several specialized seminars in public relations on topics such as public relations management and its appropriate place in the organizational structure; behavior of publics; public relations roles, law, history and operations; and global perspectives on public relations.

Public relations Ph.D. students should be encouraged to take research seminars in related social, behavioral and business sciences that are particularly relevant to public relations in order to learn the theories and methods of those related disciplines. These courses, for example, could include the sociology of organization, organizational communication, operations research and management science, political behavior, sociology of collective behavior, public opinion, language usage and communication and social psychology.

Finally, the public relations Ph.D. candidate should conduct dissertation research in which he or she studies theory applicable to the solution of important public relations problems and in specific topic areas in public relations such as investor relations, crisis management, issues management, social responsibility, marketing public relations and integrated communications.

However, a doctoral program also has the obligation to prepare students to teach by involving students in the classroom and developing their teaching skills because many, if not most, graduates will accept positions as public relations faculty.

9. Recommendations for Continuing Education

Purpose of Continuing Education

Continuing education has been an important aspect of professional education throughout the evolution of public relations in the 20th Century. In the historical sense, continuing education has meant education for the adult learner outside the traditional degree programs of a college or universities. Continuing education in public relations might well be identified as "lifelong learning" because it seeks to add to or refresh the knowledge or skills of those familiar with and/or already working in the practice of public relations. The purpose of this instruction should be to provide for the ongoing professional development and advancement of public relations professionals, from entry-level beginners through senior executives. It is important that continuing education courses, faculty and resources be of comparable quality with those of degree-granting public relations programs, as described elsewhere in this report.

Desired Outcomes of Continuing Education

Sometimes continuing education is provided on a college or university campus, although often it is not. Sometimes it is provided by traditional modes of instruction, although increasingly it is being provided by "distance education" or "distance learning" that the Commission defines as any instruction that takes place with the instructor and student physically separated from each other. Sometimes it is a one-hour workshop or a half-day seminar, sometimes carrying CEUs (continuing education units).

Increasingly important in continuing education is the growing number of certificate programs; while not degree programs per se, they group a number of courses together into a logical program of study. The Commission suggests that academic criteria in certificate programs should be no different from those in degree programs, especially when the courses used in certificate programs are the same courses that traditional students might use to meet undergraduate or graduate degree requirements.

The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education focused solely on continuing education offered as for-credit instruction, acknowledging that many professional associations and private vendors also offer workshops and seminars not linked to academic credit that are legitimate continuing education opportunities.

As a result of their participation in for-credit continuing education courses or programs, public relations practitioners should add to their knowledge of the concepts, theories and practices of the profession.

Curriculum

In continuing education, just as in traditional degree programs, curriculum models differ from institution to institution. No one model can serve all.

For undergraduate-level continuing education offerings, the guidelines presented by the Commission certainly are appropriate. Likewise, when the continuing education offerings are at an advanced level and offered to practitioners who already have undergraduate degrees, the master's degree guidelines suggested by the Commission are relevant.

Continuing education is offered using perhaps a greater variety of teaching methods than traditional undergraduate or graduate courses. Typically, continuing education has led the way in pioneering new teaching methodologies, particularly distance education methods. Active learning often is enhanced through student involvement with new technologies such as the Web.

In addition to traditional teaching techniques, continuing education often utilizes Internet transmission of course material by either asynchronous or synchronous course delivery; video-assisted instruction; a combination of Web and television instruction; satellite or broadcast instruction; delivery by compressed video, or other technology-based modes of delivery. Often traditional and distance education modes are combined in one course: a week-long face-to-face introduction to the course might be followed with additional meetings on-line or through E-mail interaction.

Continuing education courses in public relations often have been provided by public relations faculty who teach them on an overload basis, as "extra" assignments for which they receive extra compensation. An exception has been at some land-grant institutions whose mission is heavily outreach-oriented; some of these schools have made continuing education instruction part or all of a full-time faculty member's regular responsibilities.

When continuing education is offered by distance education technologies, the model of faculty overload doesn't always work well. It takes considerable effort to teach Web-based or television-delivered courses, and incentives beyond a bit more salary need to be developed to encourage faculty to develop and teach these courses.

Because continuing education is likely to be offered increasingly through new technologies, state-of-the-art hardware and software are essential for those institutions offering continuing education courses and for those students enrolling in them.

Professional societies and associations, such as PRSA and IABC, would do well to partner with colleges and universities to ensure that appropriate continuing education modules are developed and offered. These associations and public relations foundations, notably the Institute for Public Relations and the PRSA Foundation, are encouraged to provide seed money for the development of continuing education courses and certificate programs to ensure that public relations learning is, indeed, lifelong.

10. Teaching Methods

The teaching of public relations at all levels should emphasize active learning. Given the fact that much public relations work is done by teams of practitioners, team-based and service learning also should be encouraged.

Teaching involves the delivery of instruction; the creation of student assignments and learning activities; and the application of instructional media to the classroom, laboratory and distance learning environment.

The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education presents these recommendations on teaching methods because it believes it is not only important to address curriculum content but also to address how that content can best be transmitted.

Delivery of Instruction

Lectures are a delivery technique familiar to students, especially helpful in introducing and examining a broad range of material, particularly abstract concepts. The best lecturers will incorporate a lively and informative style, and encourage interactivity with students through discussion, dialogue and questioning.

Guest lecturers and speakers add fresh voices to the classroom, which increases student interest. Practitioners can bring the practice of public relations into the classroom and provide a bridge between student and professional associations. The pool of available guest lecturers for most programs is typically large, and professionals usually are enthusiastic about assisting in this way.

Simulations and role playing also are very effective teaching methods for selected topics. Both encourage student involvement (affective learning) and aid in student retention of material. The teacher can control the simulation in ways he or she could not if students were working with an actual client or situation.

Games are useful ways to simplify abstract concepts and are particularly useful for teaching remedial skills and history or for review sessions, such as those that might be held to help students prepare for an examination.

Small group discussion and in-class exercises provide essential learning opportunities in the area of team building and group dynamics. This teaching method also helps develop brainstorming and analytical skills as students learn to give and receive critiques.

Having students make oral presentations in class provides them with practice in a skill that will be vital to them as practitioners, making client presentations and defending their ideas in meetings. Oral presentations offer a good opportunity for peer or practitioner evaluation of student work, and also for interaction and networking with both peers and practitioners. They also can be useful in helping students learn to create and use computer-aided presentations and visual aids.

Teaching writing and design or production skills in a computer classroom or lab gives students an opportunity to build their skills and their computer literacy.

The use of field trips is another teaching method that provides an opportunity for interactive learning as students see the practice of public relations in process and interact with practitioners.

Instruction is increasingly being delivered through distance education, as described in Part 9 of this report, using a variety of techniques: on-line Internet delivery of lectures and readings, chat rooms and E-mail interaction between student and professor, combinations of video-Web-television instruction and delivery of entire courses by broadcast media or satellite.

Assignments and Activities

Case studies, an excellent bridge between theory and application, can be used at all class levels to promote learning. Regardless of the model, case studies teach analytical and critical thinking skills.

Incorporating the planning (and sometimes even the implementation) of campaigns into public relations courses adds depth and detail, and provides opportunities for students to translate theory into practice. Carrying a plan through to implementation adds the dimension of learning about client relationships and, when the client is "real," provides another opportunity for professional networking.

Instructional Media

Audio and video recordings are useful not only because they present important material in an interesting way, but because by listening or viewing, students also learn to recognize production quality.

The Internet (and when available an Intranet) have many applications in public relations teaching: as the source of case studies and research data, as a means of contact with practitioners and as an interactive communication channel between faculty and students. Its potential for interactivity makes it especially appealing in distance

education settings.

11. Evaluation

Both academic programs and the students enrolled in them should be evaluated. In the case of students, the objective is to ascertain whether students learned what the curriculum and their faculty intended. In the case of programs, the objective of the evaluation is to ascertain and ensure quality of the curriculum, how it is taught, the quality of that instruction and the resources provided to support the educational effort.

Evaluation of Students

Student evaluation may be normative, formative and/or summative.

Normative assessment is usually undertaken to determine which students are eligible to enter or to advance within the public relations program. Normative assessment tools might include:

- o required entrance exams
 - o assessment of the extent to which the student possesses the attitudes and behaviors of professionals
 - o screening through standardized test scores and placement tests in subjects such as English, spelling and math
 - o high school and projected college GPA
 - o performance in pre-requisite classes
 - o writing and speaking apprehension
 - o internship performance as a screen for subsequent internships
- Formative assessment is evaluation that provides continuing feedback throughout a student's degree program. Formative assessment tools might include:
- o faculty evaluation and grading of assignments
 - o tests that screen for skill proficiency
 - o capstone courses to measure ability to conceptualize and apply knowledge
 - o case study analysis to measure critical thinking
 - o oral and computer-aided presentations to measure presentation skills
 - o evaluation of internships by both faculty and site supervisors
 - o review of a portfolio of student work
 - o examination of career objectives, expectations, knowledge, preparation and future plans
 - o measurement of sensitivity to multicultural environments and diversity, perhaps using a standardized test such as that used by the U.S. Navy to test for multicultural sensitivity
- Summative assessment is conducted at the time a student completes a degree program. Appropriate tools might include:
- o review of a portfolio of student work to assess writing and presentation skills, research skills, analytical ability and ability to complete projects or campaigns
 - o faculty assessment of strengths and weaknesses, either in writing or as an exit interview
 - o administration of an organizational simulation of a public relations work environment
 - o review of professional experience gained through course assignments, internships or other work experience

Evaluation of Programs

Program evaluation can be accomplished through self-assessment and external review.

1. Self-Assessment

Public relations programs should continually measure their effectiveness in delivering instruction in both degree-oriented and continuing education courses by utilizing the following self-assessment tools:

- o Teacher-course evaluations by students, peers and administrators
- o Faculty-student ratios
- o Job placement rates
- o Percent of public relations graduates working in the field
- o Graduate school admissions
- o Exit interviews and surveys
- o Alumni satisfaction surveys
- o Employer satisfaction surveys
- o Professional accreditation of alumni
- o Input of advisory boards

Programs also are advised to monitor such quality indicators as instructional innovations, particularly integration of new technologies; student access to courses in related disciplines (e.g., business); vitality of student organizations; involvement of professionals; and equitable distribution of resources. Finally, programs should

periodically compare the content of the courses they offer to the Commission's recommendations.

2. External Review

Three organizations currently provide external review of academic programs in public relations education: PRSA, NCA and the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). PRSA's Certification of Education in Public Relations (CEPR) provides professional association certification for programs housed in any academic discipline, including communication, journalism and business. NCA's Program Review, on the other hand, provides educator assessment for programs housed in communication colleges, schools or departments. Similarly, ACEJMC examines programs housed in journalism and mass communication units. ACEJMC is the only one of the three authorized by the U.S. Department of Education to grant professional accreditation. Review by any of the three organizations is at the invitation of the program unit.

PRSA's certification process is coordinated by its Educational Affairs Committee, which consists of both educators and practitioners. After receipt of a required self-study, the committee assigns a visiting team of two or three members who examine the public relations program on site over three to four days. Criteria for evaluation are based on the most recent guidelines of the Commission on Public Relations Education. Among program elements reviewed are curriculum, faculty/student ratio, resources, internships, student counseling, job placement and involvement and support of professionals. Team members visit classes, check records and interview faculty, administrators, students, alumni and practitioners. At the conclusion of the on-site review, the team makes a preliminary report of its findings, including strengths and weaknesses of the program, to the program's coordinator. A written report with the team's recommendation is submitted to the Educational Affairs Committee, which decides whether or not to grant certification. The committee's decision is then forwarded to PRSA's Board of Directors for approval.

In ACEJMC accreditation, the entire academic unit — college, school or department — is evaluated through a review of all programs in the unit, which might include advertising, broadcasting, newspaper journalism, magazine journalism and public relations. The process begins with a self-study based on 12 standards. A three-day site visit is conducted by a team of three to six educators and practitioners who represent the unit's various disciplines. When the unit has a public relations component, an effort is made to include a public relations educator or practitioner on the team.

During its campus visit, the ACEJMC team examines the unit's compliance with the 12 standards, which deal with governance/administration, budget, curriculum, student records/advising, instruction/evaluation, faculty credentials and qualifications, internships and work experience, faculty scholarship/research/professional activities, public service, graduates/alumni, and minority and female representation, respectively. As in the PRSA process, team members monitor classes, check records and interview faculty, students and representatives of other relevant groups. The team prepares a written draft report of its findings before leaving campus and presents copies of the report to the unit administrator and the institution's president. Responses from the unit and institution are considered before the report is finalized and submitted to ACEJMC's Accrediting Committee, which recommends full accreditation, provisional accreditation (meaning the unit must correct specified deficiencies in one year) or denial of accreditation. The committee then forwards its recommendation to ACEJMC's Accrediting Council for a final decision. Institutional representatives are invited to the meetings of both groups. Units must be reaccredited every six years.

Of the 24 professional, practitioner organizations which are dues-paying members of ACEJMC, only one — PRSA — represents the profession of public relations. Thus the profession has only one voice and one vote on decisions made by ACEJMC's Accrediting Council. In contrast, other disciplines are represented by multiple professional organizations, each with one or more votes. For example, advertising is represented by two organizations (American Academy of Advertising and American Advertising Federation), broadcasting by four (Broadcast Education Association, National Association of Broadcasters, National Association of TV Program Executives and Radio-Television News Directors Association) and newspaper journalism by eight (American Society of Newspaper Editors, Associated Press Managing Editors, National Conference of Editorial Writers, National Newspaper Foundation, Newspaper Association of America, Society of Professional Journalists, Southern Newspaper Publishers Association and the Inland Press Association).

Only a minority of academic programs in public relations are certified by PRSA or accredited by ACEJMC. As noted earlier in this report, approximately one half of all public relations programs are housed in communication units, which are not eligible for ACEJMC accreditation. Such programs are eligible for PRSA certification; however, relatively few programs have sought CEPR status to date. Furthermore, of the hundreds of journalism and mass communication units that teach public relations, only 109 currently are accredited by ACEJMC.

The NCA process bridges the gap between self-assessment and external review. The association provides the Communication Programs Rationale and Review Kit (1997), which presents questions to guide self-assessment (for example, "Has our department kept pace with the discipline?"), lists NCA resources and services to aid

evaluation (for example, contact information for nationally recognized communication specialists in teaching, research and service), and offers the association's Program Review Service. More collegial than the processes of PRSA and ACEJMC, NCA's on-site Program Review brings "consultants" to campus rather than "evaluators." The service allows the host unit to determine the number of consultants, choose their specialization and geographic location, and even select named individuals (NCA also will recommend team members if a host unit desires). The consultants' report goes to the unit requesting the review, not to NCA.

All of these program evaluation processes would be more valuable if:

- o More public relations programs sought accreditation and/or certification.
- o Additional public relations organizations, such as the Arthur W. Page Society, IABC, Council of Public Relations Firms, Institute for Public Relations, PRSA Foundation, and International Public Relations Association (IPRA), obtained membership in ACEJMC. Representation should also be solicited from educator associations with large public relations memberships, such as NCA and ICA..
- o ACEJMC teams better reflected the composition of the student body of the unit reviewed, particularly those in which public relations is a major component.

12. Faculty Qualifications

Both academic and professional credentials and experience are important qualifications for public relations faculty. It also is critical that public relations faculty share the understanding that public relations is practiced in an interdisciplinary, multicultural and global context.

Programs may use both full-time and part-time faculty to teach public relations courses. It is important, however, that the majority of public relations instruction be provided by full-time faculty.

Perhaps the ideal full-time faculty member is an individual with both the academic credential of a terminal degree, usually the Ph.D., and the professional credential of significant work experience in the field of public relations. And to the extent that they exist — they do, but in relatively small number — academic programs would do well to hire individuals with both sets of credentials.

What is perhaps more realistic is for academic programs to have among their full-time public relations faculty a balance of those with terminal degrees and those who may not have terminal degrees but whose professional experience is significant and substantial. Particularly in programs that offer graduate degrees, it is critical that there be full-time faculty with Ph.D.s capable of teaching public relations theory and research and qualified to direct graduate thesis and dissertations in public relations. When no graduate faculty who specialize in public relations research are available to guide and mentor graduate students, they may be diverted into a thesis or dissertation that does not encourage an interest in public relations.

Adjunct (part-time) and temporary full-time faculty should, in every case, have at least an undergraduate degree and relevant professional public relations experience. It is highly desirable that they be personally accredited or certified by a professional public relations organization, especially when their college degree is in a field other than public relations.

Most adjunct faculty will be drawn from the ranks of those currently working in public relations, so their professional expertise is being updated and refined on a daily basis. Because they are often not experienced teachers, it is essential that adjuncts be provided with appropriate training for the classroom.

Full-time faculty must create their own opportunities — one would hope with the enthusiastic leadership of practitioners and professional organizations — to keep up with current public relations practices through "professor in residence" programs, faculty-professional exchanges, participation in professional development programs and sabbaticals.

All faculty, both full-time and adjunct, should be members of and participate in professional and/or academic associations and conferences.

And all faculty, both full-time and adjunct, should be contributing to the public relations body of knowledge through scholarship and professional or creative activity. The form that contribution may take will, of course, vary depending on whether the faculty member has primarily academic or professional credentials.

The Commission repeats a recommendation from the 1987 Commission report: "Public relations courses should not be taught by people who have little or no experience and interest in the field and have no academic preparation in public relations."

13. Resources Needed for Public Relations Programs

Public relations faculty and students should have resources comparable to those available to faculty and students in other academic programs in the academic unit where public relations is taught.

It also is important that faculty in public relations programs have responsibility for those matters and decisions that directly affect public relations faculty, students and the units of which they are a part.

Workloads of public relations faculty should reflect the full range of responsibilities assigned to them: teaching, advising, research, service, administrative assignments and the supervision or advising of student organizations such as PRSSA or student public relations agencies.

Administrative and financial resources necessary to support public relations education include:

- o personnel: faculty, both full-time and part-time, who are paid commensurate with faculty in other programs in the academic unit
- o staff support: secretarial and technical support personnel
- o equipment and facilities in classrooms, labs and faculty offices: computer hardware, software and peripherals; classrooms specially equipped for presentations; research facilities, particularly a telephone bank for surveys and space suitable for simulating or conducting focus groups, and space for student organizations
- o travel and professional development support; funding for travel to academic and professional conferences, for payment of professional association dues, for participation in workshops or other professional development programs
- o operating support: telephone, books and other materials used in teaching, postage, photocopying, FAXes
- o library: materials to inform both teaching and research

Faculty-student ratios should conform to those recommended by national accrediting bodies (such as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications) and those that certify programs (such as Public Relations Society of America). There should be qualified full-time faculty members teaching public relations when it is offered as a major, emphasis or focus, the number of those faculty dependent on student enrollment. Full-time public relations faculty should teach the majority of required courses.

Scholarships and financial aid should be available to students. This is particularly critical in graduate programs where funding is perhaps the deciding factor as programs compete for the best students for assistantship and fellowship awards.

While most administrative and operating expenses are the responsibility of academic units, there are other resources that must be provided by the profession. Among these are providing internship and professional residency programs for students and faculty, supporting and serving on advisory boards, endowing chairs and faculty positions in public relations and providing examples and samples of public relations work, especially audio-visual materials, for classroom use.

14. Global Implications of the Commission's Recommendations

A major assumption of the Commission was that its report would focus primarily on higher education in the United States. The Commission's members were principally associated with USA-based institutions, and, given the range of factors that can affect higher education in public relations, the Commission did not want to presume to make recommendations for other nations and cultures.

However, the Commission did want to enable educators and practitioners in other countries to adapt or adopt its recommendations if they so choose. To that end, the Commission identified the following factors that affect public relations higher education, to a greater or lesser extent, in all societies and cultures.

The following list is not exhaustive. The factors are presented in the hopes that others may find them helpful in explaining and guiding public relations higher education not only in the USA but also elsewhere in the world.

Cultural Values and Beliefs

- o Importance within society of truth-telling, fairness, justice and the concept of doing no harm to the innocent.
- o Degree of comfort with uncertainty within society as seen in the collective attitudes toward centralized or decentralized control.
- o Attitudes toward men and women.
- o Degree of acceptance (or not) of class differences and assumptions about an individual's duties and responsibilities to others in society.

Laws and Public Policies

- o Structure of and support for higher education, including the degree of politicization of higher education within society.
- o Public support for technological infrastructure within the economy.
- o Freedom of press and individual rights to free speech and related issues.
- o Policies regarding free markets and "transparent" economic exchanges, especially in the areas of corporate disclosure.

External Groups, Organizations and Associations

- o Employer demand for university graduates who have majored or specialized in public relations.
- o Number of professional associations in the field and their support for higher education.
- o Number of organizations in region, including activist publics, that emphasize and appreciate public information, public relations, and public affairs.
- o Number of competing institutions of higher education.

Organizational Factors

- o Size, complexity and sources of resources for the institution, be it a university or college.
- o The historic, legal mandate or stated function of the institution.
- o Technological infrastructure of the institution.

Small Group Factors Within Institutions

- o Qualifications of the faculty and how they relate to students—for example, the degree of power differentiation or egalitarianism experienced in the classroom.
- o Qualifications of faculty and staff and how they relate to each other—for example, the "natural tension" often experienced between journalism and public relations faculty.
- o Worldview of the institution's dominant coalition: do senior administrators at the university encourage change and innovation, or not.

Interpersonal Factors Within Institutions

- o Role expectations between individual administrators and faculty members.
- o Role expectations between an individual faculty member and a student.
- o Role expectations outside the university between clients and practitioners—for example, is the practitioner expected by the client to be a technician or a problem solver?

Intrapersonal Factors and Traits Within Individuals

- o Intelligence of the students, faculty members, practitioners.
- o Sex/gender—physical traits and internalized sex roles.
- o Maturity (not the same as age).
- o Eagerness and willingness to learn.

In sum, public relations both as a professional practice and as an academic discipline may be considered protean—readily assuming various roles and structures depending on its internal and external environments. The wide variety of social environments and public relations practices around the world means that inevitably there are, and will continue to be, a variety of models of public relations higher education.

15. A Call to Action: Public Relations Education and the Practice

Symbiosis is not too strong a descriptor of the relationship between public relations education and the professional practice of public relations. Yet there is much to do to realize the full potential of this mutually-beneficial relationship.

The key to progress here, the Commission suggests, is to base future cooperative efforts on a simple, practical statement of respective needs: Public relations educators need additional resources and recognition; the practice needs a steady flow of graduates who are prepared to enter, or re-enter, the profession and, as the saying goes, "hit the ground running."

So what is to be done?

The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education recommends a seven-point interactive program:

1. Public relations practitioners should take a new look at the "products" of today's public relations education. Those who have, are impressed with the breadth and depth of knowledge and skill students bring to internships and entry-level employment. Those who haven't, are missing what is quite often a good hiring "bet."
2. There is a great need for significantly increased support from practitioners for accreditation/certification of public relations programs. In the year 2000, three to five additional public relations seats on The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) should be sponsored by the practice. This will generate added practitioner participation on campus accreditation site visit teams as well as in the final decisions on which programs are to be accredited.
3. The practice should establish additional endowed chairs in public relations at academic institutions with outstanding public relations programs. A chair is costly and may require the pooling of financial assistance from several organizations and their clients, but chairs represent prestige externally and clout internally.
4. Successful individual public relations professionals, especially those who have benefited handsomely from public relations practice, should consider making significant contributions to the public relations programs of their choice. Such philanthropy, common in other professional fields, would mark public relations as a field in which one generation of practitioners is tied to succeeding generations by commitment to the development of the profession.
5. Public relations educators and professionals can advance the appreciation of the field among influentials and the general public by jointly developing and participating in projects of topical and long-term social significance. Educators bring intellectual legitimacy and credibility to such projects; practitioners — individually and through organizations such as PRSA, The Arthur Page Society, the newly-formed Council of Public Relations Firms and the various public relations institutes and foundations — can add strategic input and needed resources. The "outside world" must be engaged on hot macro issues: for example, ethical communications conduct in the age of global interdependence. Structures for such activities already exist. They include the PRSA/CPRF Socratic Dialogues (in April, 1999 such a dialogue was held at The Annenberg School). Partnering organizations have included the Ethics Officers Association and several national trade associations.
6. Joint research projects, administered by educators and funded by the practice, can not only advance the educator-practitioner relationship but also expand the public relations body of knowledge. Moreover, when the research subjects are of topical interests — say, on employee behavioral response to key messages — they provide an opportunity for positive exposure of the true gravitas of the profession. And if adequately funded (\$50,000 - \$500,000 or more), the research can impress academic influentials.
7. Finally, "traditional" support programs for public relations educators, their students and their programs must be re-doubled. This means more practitioner-funded scholarships, more paid internships, more support of PRSSA to benefit students, and more faculty enrichment programs including inter-term employment and other imaginative cooperative efforts.

Other kinds of such professional support also must be considered, such as the valuable expenditure of professionals' time on campus to strengthen public relations programs. Both individual practitioners and professional associations can be invaluable in providing advice and feedback to programs and their faculties. Advisory boards also can provide financial and other resources that enhance program quality.

These programs, and others like them, will further enhance the likelihood that public relations education, through its own growth and development, will produce more successful public relations practitioners and leaders and advance the profession's contribution to society.

Appendix A: The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education

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Appendix B: Research and Reports
Used by the 1999 Commission

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Glossary of Organizations Cited in the Report

Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC)

American Management Association

American Marketing Association

Arthur Page Society

Council of Public Relations Firms (CPRF)

Institute for Public Relations (formerly the Institute for Public Relations Research and Education)

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

International Communication Association (ICA)

International Public Relations Association (IPRA)

National Communication Association (NCA)
Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)
Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)

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