

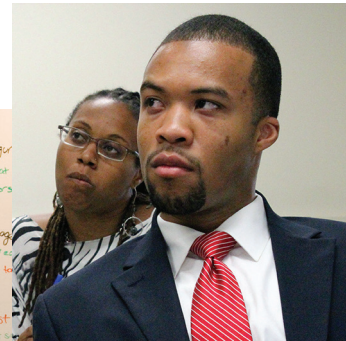


COMMISSION ON
PUBLIC RELATIONS
EDUCATION

Standards for a Master's Degree
in Public Relations:

Educating for Complexity

The Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education



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Preface and Acknowledgments

The Commission on Public Relations Education acknowledges the support and contributions of many individuals and organizations in the preparation of this 2012 report that provides standards for U.S.-based master's degree education in public relations.

The report's standards were informed by research that was performed by Commission members and their colleagues at Syracuse University and at the University of Maryland. The research was funded by the PRSA Foundation. In addition, the PRSA Foundation and The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations provided financial support for the publication and dissemination of this report.

Members of the Commission, who collectively represent a wide range of scholarly/professional associations that are stakeholders in public relations education, worked untold hours diligently analyzing and interpreting the findings of the research, deliberating final recommendations and writing this report.

Judy VanSlyke Turk, Virginia Commonwealth University, performed the formidable task of editing the document. The Commission's executive committee that managed the process included Maria Russell, Syracuse University; Elizabeth Toth, University of Maryland; and co-chairs Frank Ovatt, Institute for Public

Relations, and Dean Kruckeberg, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Introduction and Context for This Commission Report

Since 1975, the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE), which is comprised of public relations educators and practitioners who represent organizations in public relations and related fields, has studied U.S.-based undergraduate public relations education. CPRE's reports and recommendations have been widely adopted by programs that prepare undergraduate students with a strong foundation for entry into the public relations profession, both in the United States as well as elsewhere throughout the world. The Commission's recommendations throughout the years also have influenced criteria for Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) Chapters, standards for PRSA Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) and the recommendations of other organizations that influence under-

graduate public relations education throughout the world.

Now the Commission must address the burgeoning growth of master's degree programs in public relations. This growth in graduate education can be measured not only in the rapidly increasing numbers of students and programs, but also in the types of programs and the range of providers: 1) that are available on campus and online; 2) that are academically and professionally focused; and 3) that are offered by traditional academic institutions and by commercial enterprises, the latter of which were not examined in the Commission's research.

Today, some master's degree programs are almost wholly theoretical, while others are almost totally applied, to the extent that the latter may be devoid of theory and research courses. In addition, some graduate programs in public relations may be considered little more than a "fifth year" of undergraduate education.

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) is attempting to evaluate public relations as part of its review of professional graduate programs in schools of journalism and mass communication. But the specific curricular requirements for public relations graduate education remain poorly defined, and many master's degree programs in public relations are not eligible for ACEJMC accreditation because their academic homes are not in journalism or mass communication programs. That situation has prompted PRSA to "certify" both undergraduate and graduate programs. PRSA and its Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) program have taken leadership roles in establishing these certification standards, and, today, in-

creasing numbers of both undergraduate and graduate programs are seeking CEPR certification. But this certification process would benefit from better-defined standards at the master's level.

While graduate education had not been ignored in previous Commission reports, it has received a rather cursory review. In fact, no comprehensive standards have been attempted in at least two decades that the Commission could find. The only prior examples appear to be a 1982 International Public Relations Association (IPRA) Gold Paper, "A Model for Public Relations Education for Professional Practice" (International Public Relations Association, 1982) and a 1985 report, "Advancing Public Relations Education: Recommended Curriculum for Graduate Public Relations Education" (National Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations, 1985).

Given the growth of master's-level public relations education in recent years, rigorous standards in this area are badly needed. This report will serve the profession, the academic institutions that confer graduate degrees in public relations, the students who are enrolled in master's degree programs in public relations and the organizations that employ these graduates as practitioners or professors.

Goals of the Report

1. To provide academic standards for master's-level public relations programs, both those designed to prepare graduates for the professional practice of public relations as well as those intended to prepare graduates for doctoral study.
2. To recommend guidelines for accrediting and certifying bodies for master's-level public relations education programs.

3. To elevate expectations for master's-level public relations education above those normally set for undergraduate programs of study.
4. To recommend standards for educators who teach in public relations graduate programs.
5. To engage the public relations industry in support of graduate public relations education.

Definition of Terms

Titles

Public relations master's degree programs have many different titles. Among them are public relations, strategic public relations, strategic management and communication management. In the Commission's research for this report, we had used the terms "public relations" and "communication management" synonymously; however, in this report we will use the term "public relations" to collectively describe these programs.

Professional Graduate Program

A professional graduate program is a post-baccalaureate academic program that prepares students to think strategically and critically and to master the skills and to be able to fulfill the responsibilities of professional public relations practice, as well as to understand and respect the ethical decision-making requirements for a public relations management position.

Academic Graduate Program

An academic graduate program is a post-baccalaureate academic program that prepares students for university teaching and research careers that are grounded in professional practice.

Driving Forces Behind Growth of Public Relations Graduate Programs in the United States

Graduate public relations education represents a relatively new discipline in U.S. colleges and universities. Although there were occasional graduate courses offered in several universities as early as 1920, and a few graduate degree programs in public relations were developed in the late 1940s, the rapid growth and development of graduate education in public relations began in the 1960s and 1970s, and has accelerated over the past decade.

In addition to formal public relations education programs at colleges and universities, there has been an explosion of professional development offerings, not only from the traditional deliverers — professional societies such as PRSA, International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Institute for Public Relations, the Arthur W. Page Society — but also from an ever-growing list of commercial enterprises and trade publications. These offerings, which do not offer academic credit toward a graduate degree, come in a variety of models ranging from traditional face-to-face seminars and conferences to teleconferences and webinars.

While many practitioners see the need for advanced and/or continuing education, a large number cannot take advantage of traditional master's degree programs because these are usually offered during the workday. Even the time-tested model of evening and weekend classes — long the solution for working professionals — is difficult for those practitioners trying to balance work and family obligations. The world is now 24/7, and public relations practitioners are among those who feel the need to respond 24/7 to

bosses, clients and the media. Globalization is exacerbating this situation because these practitioners are responsible for communicating across time zones, geographic boundaries and cultures.

Since 2000, the number of master's degree public relations education programs in the United States has grown from 26 to 75 (when the Commission's research was completed in 2011). Market demand is the primary driver of this growth, but there are many "supply" drivers as well. As journalism and mass media go through the throes of radical change, enrollments in these curricula have dropped dramatically. To replace those students, many schools are looking to the areas that are experiencing growth: public relations, advertising and digital journalism. Universities also are seeking new and nontraditional students, e.g., international students, particularly from Asia, and "older" students, often working professionals, to offset declining enrollments and budget cuts. The rise of "for-profit" universities is another response to this growing demand for graduate education. A variation on the "for-profit" university is the appearance of commercial enterprises that partner with traditional universities to manage branding, marketing and recruitment of students.

Technology and improvements in learning software have aided the growth of graduate programs. Of the 75 master's degree programs in the United States that were identified in research for this study, eight were delivered totally online. Another four were delivered in a "blended" or "hybrid" model of short, on-campus residencies followed by independent study and distance learning. Some universities have had a long tradition of "distance education," particularly those institutions serving rural populations. For

them, this growth is a natural extension of their outreach.

Value of a Master's Degree Program in Public Relations

Today's business environment has become increasingly complex and poses myriad challenges for public relations practitioners who must have a detailed understanding of the forces that affect organizations; that influence commercial, institutional and political trends; and that shape society. Today's practitioners, especially those in management positions, must possess the ability to conduct research and to think strategically in every situation.

A Public Relations Professional Master's Degree Program

A professional master's degree in public relations should provide students and their present and future employers with a competitive edge in a competitive environment. Such a master's degree program teaches the nuances of public relations and management techniques as well as leadership, business and communication skills. Specifically, public relations educators and practitioners expect a professional master's degree in public relations to provide:

- An appreciation for the importance of globalization, entrepreneurship and technology in today's business environment.
- An understanding of the interactions of the key functional aspects of an organization.
- An understanding of the role of communication in society and the ethical challenges of global public relations.
- Well-developed leadership skills and understanding of business.

- An understanding of, and the skills necessary to participate in, effective teamwork.
- Improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Social science research and evaluation knowledge and skills.
- Cutting-edge communication management abilities.

A Public Relations Academic Master's Degree Program

An academic master's degree program in public relations should build on the same outcomes of a professional master's program, but students in a public relations academic master's degree program should have additional understanding of theory and social science research methods so that they will be prepared to enter doctoral programs.

Specifically, an academic master's degree in public relations should provide, in addition to the outcomes of a professional master's degree program:

- Thorough knowledge of public relations theories and principles.
- Advanced critical thinking skills.
- Social science research skills to test new theories.
- Skills to work in applied public relations research.
- Skills to teach undergraduate public relations.
- Preparation to enter and succeed in public relations doctoral programs.

The Global Way Forward

The Commission acknowledges that most of the research that has led to this report was conducted in the United States, with a majority of participants located in the United States. However, in formulating recommendations for master's degree education in public relations, the Commission has given much consideration to global issues and context. This is reflected by the inclusion of a robust list of course content areas designed to enhance global understanding.



Research for This Report

The Commission on Public Relations Education completed a yearlong program of research to learn about the content, delivery and value of U.S. public relations master's degree education.

Goals of the research were:

1. To explore the perceptions of public relations employers/human resources directors about how they value graduate public relations education when seeking to hire.
2. To explore the perceptions of executive-level public relations practitioners and of educators about what should be the deliverables (knowledge, skills, abilities, instruction, job placement) of a master's degree in public relations.
3. To learn what (if any) graduate educational standards, certifications and/or accreditations are expected by executive-level public relations professionals and educators, regardless of where the graduate degree is offered.
4. To learn the perceptions of executive-level public relations practitioners and educators about whether graduate programs in public relations are preparing students to help lead the public relations profession.
5. To learn which (and whether) university delivery systems (traditional course, Web-facilitated, blended/hybrid, online learning) are valued by executive-level public relations practitioners and educators.
6. To provide a compendium of schools offering graduate programs in public relations, including their curricula, entrance requirements, target audiences, delivery models and accreditation/certification status.

To achieve these objectives, the Commission, in the first phase of its research, compiled a bibliography of secondary sources of information such as articles, research reports, websites, advertisements and published commentary. It conducted an audit of the descriptions of graduate public relations programs that were found on university websites.

In phase two, the Commission conducted a quantitative survey of public relations practitioners and educators to gather general perceptions of master's-level public relations education programs.

Finally, in the third and last phase of its research, the Commission collected the perceptions of public relations industry employers through the use of qualitative in-depth interviews.

Results of Phase 1

The online audit of master's degree programs showed:

- An increase in the number of public relations master's degree programs from 26 in 2000 to 75 in 2011.
- A wide variety of graduate program titles.
- A lack of uniformity in admission standards.
- A lack of uniformity in required credit hours.
- Inconsistency regarding inclusion of a cumulative/capstone experience.
- A lack of curricular uniformity across programs.

The website audit of these 75 graduate programs revealed that graduate programs in public relations were slightly more similar in content and scope than they had been in a 2000 study of program websites (Aldoory and Toth, 2000). However, only 64 percent of the 75 programs required a public relations research course, 52 percent required a communication theory course, 50.7 percent required a public relations writing course and 50.7 percent required a public relations programming and production course. Insufficient consistency across these programs makes it difficult to identify shared general expectations of a master's degree program curriculum.

In addition to the variety of course offerings, there was a wide variety in the titles of the graduate programs, with the highest percent-

age (24 percent) called "public relations." The next highest percentage (14 percent) was of programs titled "strategic communication." About one-third of the programs required that the applicant take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Thirty percent required either the GRE or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Required credit hours ranged from 21 to 48. A majority of programs did not indicate on their websites whether they had a culminating thesis or capstone project experience.

Results of Phase 2

Among the most significant findings of the quantitative survey of public relations practitioners and educators were these:

- Desirable knowledge categories tended to be grouped into "strategic management," "business," "theoretical" and "globalization." The most highly rated knowledge category was "ethics," and the highest-rated skill was "mastery of language in oral or written form."
- Completing a comprehensive project rated highest as the culminating experience for a master's degree.
- Practitioners and educators were split on whether a master's degree is important in hiring.
- Completing a master's degree made graduates eligible for research positions and was considered equivalent to three years of professional experience.

Practitioners and educators agreed that curricula should include four categories of knowledge: strategic management, business, theoretical foundations and globalization. The importance of management was reflected in the respondents' ratings of the skills that should be included in a master's degree program.

The participants reaffirmed the need for a mastery of language in oral and written form and agreed that a master's degree curriculum needed to include instruction in the skills of strategic planning, ethical decision-making, persuasive writing, management of communication, issues management and research. Even the most recommended corollary courses outside of public relations had a management component: organizational communication, mass communication law, digital media, organizational behavior, journalism and marketing.

External evaluation of program standards for a master's degree in public relations was rated highly, particularly accreditation by agencies that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, such as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and CEPR certification by the Public Relations Society of America. Respondents valued some sort of culminating experience, such as a comprehensive project, exam or thesis, and an internship or co-operative education assignment. Most respondents also agreed that master's degree education is best delivered in a traditional on-campus classroom setting or a hybrid of on-campus instruction and online delivery of courses. In spite of the growing number of online master's degree programs in public relations, the majority of respondents did not accept the validity of totally online delivery of courses with no face-to-face contact with the instructor.

Both practitioners and public relations educators preferred "public relations," "communication studies" or "journalism" as titles for master's degree programs in public relations. Business administration was rated fourth in the list of 10 program titles, still showing a strong value to the practitioners in the survey.

The study participants agreed that students completing graduate programs in public relations would be qualified for entry-level positions, for positions in research and sometimes for positions in public relations that normally require three years of professional experience, depending on the graduate's professional and internship experience.

Results of Phase 3

Qualitative in-depth interviews with 21 public relations industry employers revealed that:

- Employers emphasized "characteristics of applicants" when hiring, more so than knowledge or skills.
- Employers perceived public relations master's degree education as preparation for entry-level jobs, but still expected professional experience in addition to the graduate degree.
- Employers recommended building a "better brand" for graduate public relations education.
- Reacting to the survey results from Phase 2, employers interpreted the "split" between public relations practitioners and educators on the value of public relations graduate education in hiring in three ways: as a reflection of the difference in quality of graduate programs, in likely higher ratings by educators than practitioners and perhaps in a generational change.

Throughout the transcripts of the interviews, these employers suggested that they usually hired people who understand the management of public relations and not just the tactics of public relations. Although these employers continued to stress the need for writing skills, advanced positions in public relations involved setting strategy

based on an understanding of client needs, the client's competition and the specific business setting. Because of this, they continued to express preferences for hiring people with degrees in the humanities and business and/or seeking people with "intellectual capabilities, leadership potential, that would make them 'critical thinkers' and 'creative and innovative.'" A second implication was their perception that master's degree programs in public relations would be "more of the same" if the candidate had studied public relations at the undergraduate level. Clearly, master's degrees alone would not be sufficient for these employers to hire for advanced positions. Almost all of the participants spoke of the need, if not the requirement, for job experience.

In these interviews, the knowledge and skills most highly rated by public relations employers were not the same knowledge and skills that were highly rated in the quantitative survey. Instead, these employers emphasized

business knowledge. They also were less concerned about public relations knowledge and skills than they were about the individual traits of potential hires, such as critical thinking ability, intellectual capability and curiosity.

The employers provided concrete suggestions for how a master's degree in public relations could be made more valuable. They suggested a more "practical" curriculum that would be visibly tied to "real world experiences." They suggested making the programs rigorous and selective.

By implication, they suggested that programs were "too theoretical" and that faculty should have professional public relations experience. They called for more standardization of programs so that master's degree programs in public relations would be understood more clearly, and they focused attention on "building the brand" of graduate education in public relations.

The Curriculum in a Master's Degree Program

Previous Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) reports have included general guidelines for graduate programs in public relations, but only in 2011–2012 has the Commission focused explicitly on what master's degree programs should teach and what master's degree students should learn.

The Commission offers its curriculum recommendations, noting these important overall characteristics of those standards:

- The Commission recommends content areas, not specific courses. It should be up to individual college and university programs to determine how these content areas are incorporated into courses.
- The Commission recommends that the master's degree in public relations consists of a minimum of 30 semester credit hours.
- Courses in which graduate students are enrolled must set distinctly higher and more rigorous expectations for graduate students, regardless of whether these are available to graduate students only or are cross-listed to permit undergraduate and graduate students to enroll in the same course.
- The Commission intends for its standards to be applicable both to master's degree

programs that are specifically called public relations degree programs and to programs in which public relations is a track, sequence or concentration in a broader master's degree program, such as a master's degree in communication, mass communication, strategic communication and/or journalism.

The Master's Degree Core Curriculum

Public relations practitioners and educators agree that the core curriculum of a master's degree program should focus on essential competencies and skills and that mastery of these competencies and skills must be made the learning outcomes of master's-level graduate education, to be assessed by measuring student performance. The core curriculum should address knowledge and skills in these content areas:

- Strategic public relations management
- Basic business principles and processes

- Communication/public relations theory and research methods
- Global influences on the practice of public relations
- Ethics

Strategic Public Relations Management

Public relations practitioners and educators agree that the knowledge and skills involved in management of strategic public relations are critical components of a master's degree in public relations.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that the curriculum of a master's degree in public relations include these content areas:

- Organization management. This area should familiarize students with planning, organizing, evaluating, staffing, counseling, leadership and budgeting in various settings, including corporations, government agencies and nonprofit organizations.
- Relationship management. Students should understand the characteristics of publics, distinctions between publics and communication audiences, types of publics, the concept of opinion leaders and the stages of development of publics.
- Strategic public relations best practices in a digital environment. This area should familiarize students with ways in which digital and social media are transforming the practice of public relations, including their incorporation into public relations programs and campaigns, and their use in environmental scanning, informing and persuading publics and building dialogic relationships between organizations and their publics.
- Ethical issues, which should include classical theories of ethics, profit maximization vs. corporate social responsibility and current public relations codes of ethics.
- Legal issues affecting the practice of public relations. Students should understand the First Amendment and categories of speech (e.g., corporate speech and commercial speech); laws governing lobbying; Federal Trade Commission concerns regarding deceptive advertising; Food and Drug Administration guidelines for publicity about prescription drugs; the role of the Securities and Exchange Commission in, and laws regarding, communication with investors; defamation (slander and libel); invasion of privacy; product liability; and intellectual property laws (copyright, trademarks, service marks).
- Crisis communication. In this area, students should learn about types of crises, stages of crisis management, crisis planning and reputation management, principles for crisis communication and crisis communication case studies.
- Risk communication. Students should become familiar with models of risk communication; communication about risks, including natural hazards, environmental issues, food, health, safety, occupational hazards, consumer products, financial investments and terrorism; different responses to risk by diverse publics; and laws and government regulations that mandate organizational risk communication.

The Commission also recommends that master's degree students acquire a range of strategic public relations management skills, including:

- Written and oral communication. Students should be able to develop

strategic plans based on research, to write and present plans, to apply appropriate writing styles for specific media and to demonstrate effective public speaking skills.

- **Strategic planning.** Based on the classic four-step RACE (Research-Action-Communication-Evaluation) formula, this area should include analysis of the public relations situation, organization and its key publics; establishment of goals and measurable objectives; formulation of appropriate action and response strategies; development of the message strategy; selection of communication tactics together with their budgets and timelines; and evaluation of the plan.
- **Ethical decision making.** Discussion of public relations ethical dilemmas, in tandem with a public relations code of ethics, can foster the development of ethical decision-making skills.
- **Persuasive communication techniques.** Students should understand the historical roots of persuasion; theories about persuasive communication from disciplines such as social psychology; and concepts such as cognitive dissonance, selective attention and retention, ethos, pathos and logos, message sources (including credibility, charisma and control), message content and propaganda.
- **Management of an organization's communication functions.** This area should include management of people, programs and resources, as well as communication with an organization's leadership.
- **Issues management.** Topics should include identification of future issues

that could affect an organization, research and analysis of those issues, consideration of various options for responding to the issues, development of an action plan for the best options, implementation of plans and evaluation of such plans' effectiveness.

- **Critical thinking.** This area should include the elements of reasoning involved in critical thinking, such as identification of purpose; the question at issue; assumptions, implications and consequences; and information, concepts, conclusions and point of view.
- **Creative, innovative problem-solving.** If CEOs are to turn to public relations practitioners for input into organizational decision-making, it is imperative that practitioners be able to address an organization's issues with creative and innovative decisiveness.
- **Leadership and entrepreneurship.** Leadership topics should include personality types and personality tests, emotional intelligence, creative problem-solving, how to influence others, how to inspire a shared vision for the organization and how to deal with conflict within organizations.
- **In the entrepreneurship area,** students should learn how to identify potentially valuable entrepreneurial opportunities, write a business plan, obtain the necessary resources, manage and grow the new entrepreneurial organization and create value for key stakeholders.

The ability of master's degree graduates to apply their knowledge and skills to real-life projects is essential. The possibilities include opportunities within corporations, agencies, government agencies and NGOs. One more

possibility is to incorporate service-learning opportunities to allow students to engage in client-focused projects during their master's studies. Any such opportunities should incorporate two elements: 1) work experience that involves completing public relations projects ranging from a communication audit or secondary/primary research to a comprehensive public relations campaign; and 2) a component in which students reflect on how their course-based work has contributed to the development of the organization and whether their understanding of professional responsibilities has been influenced by participation in the project.

Basic Business Principles and Processes

Information gathered by Commission members from both academic and practitioner audiences strongly suggests that all master's degree programs in public relations require graduates to gain an understanding of business principles that would include, but not necessarily be limited to, management, marketing, accounting, economics and finance, plus an understanding of return-on-investment and other strategic business outcomes.

At a time when PRSA and other groups are encouraging Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree programs to incorporate public relations components into their curricula, it makes sense for public relations graduate programs to incorporate a basic understanding of business principles. An obvious problem with this recommendation is that there is not enough room in a public relations master's degree curriculum to require courses in each of these business areas. Even if there were, because business is a popular major at most universities, it is often difficult for non-majors to enroll in

business courses, even if they have met all prerequisites. In light of these substantial obstacles, some public relations master's degree programs have created and teach specially designed courses in business principles that are required for their public relations master's degree students.

Communication/Public Relations Theory and Research Methods

A master's degree program in public relations must provide students with an understanding and the ability to apply theories in two categories:

- Theoretical foundations
- Research methodologies

The Commission recommends that public relations master's degree programs include these theoretical content areas in the graduate courses that are included in their master's degrees:

- Public relations' contribution to organizational effectiveness; models of public relations
- Publics and activism
- Ethical frameworks
- Game theory
- Contingency theory
- Rhetoric and persuasion
- Issues management
- Crisis and risk management
- Social constructivism and social construction
- Co-creational approach
- Dialogic theory
- Systems theory
- Social influence and public opinion formation

- Critical theory
- Structuration theory
- Cognitive dissonance
- Agenda setting
- Uses and gratifications
- Diffusion of innovations and consumer behavior
- Co-orientation
- Computer-mediated/new technologies

The Commission recommends that public relations master's degree programs include these methodological content areas:

- Theoretical and applied research
- Theory development
- Managing research in public relations
- Measurement
- Ethical concerns in research
- Descriptive and inferential statistical reasoning
- Qualitative research methods — historical-critical, focus groups, case studies, interviewing, observation
- Quantitative research methods — sampling, surveys and polls, experimental methods

Global Influences on the Practice of Public Relations

A master's degree program in public relations should include knowledge of the issues of global public relations so students can clearly understand the importance of practicing public relations within a global framework.

The following topics and issues should be present in the curriculum to meet the demands of rapidly expanding global public relations practice:

- Understanding reasons for varying definitions of public relations, strategic communication and communication management in different parts of the world.
- Understanding how social, economic, political and cultural dimensions influence how public relations is practiced.
- Understanding how public relations is practiced and studied in different parts of the world and the differences and similarities that exist.
- Having knowledge of major public relations theories, approaches and schools of thought developed in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia.
- Appreciating how cultural distinctions and socio-economic and political particularities influence public relations practice in different regions and countries throughout the world.
- Recognizing that social, political, economic and cultural factors may alter public relations practices, even within one country.
- Appreciating how advanced global public relations theories can be used and applied in strategic decision-making.
- Appreciating cross-cultural and intercultural communication influences on public relations globally.
- Understanding relationship-building and relationship management across national and regional borders.

The “Fork in the (Curriculum) Road”

Master's degrees in public relations tend to serve one of two purposes: preparation for a doctoral (Ph.D.) degree or preparation for strategic-level professional practice of public

relations. Therefore, after completing the core courses in a public relations master's degree program, the Commission suggests that students complete their master's degree requirements by following one direction in the "fork in the road," depending on the nature of the graduate program in which they are enrolled.

The Commission recommends that master's degree programs intended primarily to prepare students for doctoral studies require:

- Additional research courses.
- A thesis.

These requirements might total six to nine credit hours.

The Commission recommends that master's degree programs intended primarily to pre-

pare students for the professional practice of public relations require:

- Courses in an area of public relations specialization such as health care, social services, entertainment and/or sports, either offered as public relations courses or from among courses offered by other academic units.
- An internship, practicum or co-operative education experience, all of which are particularly appropriate and valuable for those master's degree students who do not have professional public relations work experience; or a more advanced experience for students who are already working professionals.

These requirements might total six to nine credit hours.



Admission Standards for Master's Degree Programs in Public Relations

Considerations

Three factors should be considered in admitting students to master's degree programs in public relations: academic ability, entry-level knowledge of public relations and personal characteristics necessary for success in a public relations career.

Academic ability can be determined through several generally accepted measures such as standardized entrance examination scores and evaluation of academic transcripts. Prior knowledge or experience in public relations can be measured through a review of resumes or with specially designed questionnaires/tests of knowledge, skills and abilities. Characteristics for success are more difficult to assess, but may be the most important of the three factors to consider for admission to a master's program in public relations. The best indicator of students who will benefit most from master's degree education and who will be most successful in public relations careers is most likely to be personal interviews with candidates who are seeking admission to master's degree programs in public relations.

Academic Ability

Students entering master's degree programs in public relations should at a minimum meet the same requirements expected of students

who are entering other master's degree programs in the same academic unit.

Criteria might include a competitive score on a general admission examination, such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or the Graduate Management Aptitude Test (GMAT) and/or an undergraduate grade point average that is sufficiently high to demonstrate a student's potential to successfully complete a master's-level curriculum. Tests designed to measure integrated reasoning and/or analytical writing ability might also be particularly useful as part of the admission requirements.

Knowledge of Public Relations

Research conducted for this report suggests that practitioners and educators agree that master's-level public relations education should emphasize strategies rather than tactics and techniques, although advanced work in tactical and technical areas such as

persuasive writing might be important. Public relations knowledge also requires an understanding of organizational science and an understanding of interactions with stakeholders.

Students entering a master's degree program without an undergraduate degree in public relations or in a related communication area could demonstrate their knowledge through several years of experience working in public relations. Additional evidence could include a credential such as those awarded by a number of professional associations in the public relations field, e.g., Accredited in Public Relations (APR) and Accredited Business Communicator (ABC).

Students without an undergraduate degree in public relations and without demonstrated professional experience should complete a set of basic undergraduate public relations courses that would include:

- Introduction to public relations (including theory, origin and principles).
- Public relations research, measurement and evaluation.
- Public relations law and ethics.
- Public relations writing and production.
- Public relations planning, management and case studies.
- Public relations campaigns.

Personal Characteristics for Success

The Commission's research suggests that individuals' personal characteristics and traits are highly important in hiring decisions. The most frequently mentioned traits were critical thinking, intellectual capability, curiosity and passion and work/life experience. Other traits mentioned were being an adaptable team player, having good "chemistry" and fit within the organization, being a risk-taker and counselor, being innovative and creative

and exhibiting emotional intelligence, good values and high integrity (Toth, Shen, and Briones, 2012, January).

Characteristics identified from research that seem to lead to success among public relations professionals and thus might well be considered in admission decisions include:

- A high-quality liberal arts education.
- A cosmopolitan worldview.
- Intellectual curiosity.
- Excellent mass and interpersonal communication skills.
- Depth and breadth of knowledge of public relations theory.
- An interest in lifelong learning.
- A fascination with the public relations environment, both within the organization and external to it.
- Empathy, wisdom and understanding of diverse populations.
- Focus on a professional role, both within the organization as well as in its external environment.
- Analytical problem-solving skills.
- Respect for the frequent need for urgency in practitioners' responsibilities.
- An orientation to goal achievement while thriving on hard work.
- An ability to complete multiple tasks that are often a combination of strategic, tactical and technical responsibilities, all of which may have tight deadlines.
- A strong work ethic.
- The understanding that public relations practitioners commonly work hours far in excess of a traditional 40-hour work week (PRQuickstart, 2012).

With increasingly daunting challenges for the

practice of public relations in the future, it is essential that today's public relations master's degree students, who likely will become tomorrow's managers of the public relations practice as well as tomorrow's public relations educators, be prepared for public relations challenges that cannot be predicted.

Master's-level students must prepare themselves well for these challenges, and master's degree academic programs must ensure that the most promising students are recruited into and enrolled in the master's degree programs that can best help fulfill this important organizational and societal role.

Delivering the Master's Degree in Public Relations

The Commission used the following definitions to describe the variety of existing delivery models: traditional course, Web-facilitated, blended/hybrid and online. These definitions were developed by the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C), an institutional and professional leadership organization dedicated to integrating online education into the mainstream

of higher education to help institutions and individual educators improve the quality, scale and breadth of education (Allen and Seaman, 2011).

Allen and Seaman (2011) note that, “While there is considerable diversity among course delivery models used by individual instructors, the following ... illustrate the prototypical course classifications ...”

Traditional course delivers 100 percent of its content face-to-face in oral and written form; nothing is delivered online.

Web-facilitated uses Web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. The course may use a course management system (CMS) or Web pages to post the syllabus and assignments. The percentage of content delivered online can range from 1 to 29 percent.

Blended/hybrid delivers 30 to 79 percent of its content online, typically through online

discussions, but also has some face-to-face meetings.

Online learning delivers 80-plus percent of the educational material electronically, with no face-to-face interaction, instead of in a “brick-and-mortar” classroom (Allen and Seaman, 2011, p. 9).

The Commission’s review of graduate public relations programs showed that of the 75 programs identified in its online census, most used the traditional model of delivery (62 programs, or 82.7 percent). Eight programs relied on online delivery, and four programs used hybrid/blended delivery that included some online and some traditional instruction.

The 2006 report of the Commission suggested, “public relations in the next decade will need to include online education in its mix of delivery methods if it is to keep pace with professional education” (“The Professional

Bond,” 2006, November, p. 8). The report continued: “To introduce quality online programs, public relations program administrators and faculty must address resources (incentives, design and development costs), pedagogy and quality assurance” (“The Professional Bond,” 2006, November, p. 8).

The 2011 research showed that master’s-level online degrees in public relations have, indeed, begun to appear. However, educators and practitioners often are suspicious of online degrees, according to the research, valuing such programs significantly less than they did degrees delivered in traditional face-to-face programs (Toth, Shen, and Briones, 2012, January). The Commission’s quantitative survey of educators and practitioners showed that both viewed traditional delivery methods more positively than they did online delivery (Toth, Shen, and Briones, 2012, January).

Traditional On-Campus Delivery of Master’s Degree Programs

Traditional on-campus master’s degree programs in public relations continue to dominate the landscape for several probable reasons. This approach is the most beneficial to universities. It is administratively easy to manage and conforms to traditional academic schedules and faculty compensation schemes. Faculty members teach the same three-hour-a-week graduate class schedule as they teach in their undergraduate programs, making it relatively easy to add a graduate class to faculty teaching loads and to determine appropriate faculty compensation. In addition, students in traditional on-campus programs usually provide additional revenue for universities beyond tuition, e.g., fees for athletic and recreation facilities and activities, on-campus dining facilities, health services and housing.

Students also find many benefits in traditional face-to-face programs. The traditional classroom delivery of courses is familiar and thus appealing to students who have their bachelor’s degrees. Also, in traditional programs, students can rely more easily on professors and academic services to help with time management and study discipline, in comparison with online programs where self-motivation and self-discipline are especially important for successful completion of degree requirements.

But there is little doubt that the numbers of online and hybrid graduate programs in public relations will continue to increase. Even traditional face-to-face programs are experimenting with online delivery by adding stand-alone online courses and hybrid or even fully online course options to their program catalogs. One of the primary reasons is the advantage of easier student access to online and hybrid programs due to ever-improving technology.

An argument against traditional face-to-face delivery — and for online or blended/hybrid programs — is that face-to-face programs require students to spend one to two years or more of their lives on campus, depending on whether they are enrolled full- or part-time. Often, especially in the middle of a professional career, it is difficult, if not impossible, for successful public relations practitioners to commit the time that a face-to-face program requires. A successful practitioner may feel a need to earn a graduate degree to enhance her or his career, but leaving her or his professional position for a year or longer may mean losing the job and having to start all over with a new employer. In addition, enrolling in a traditional on-campus program might mean relocating for a year or longer, which would raise a plethora of other issues,

including housing and mortgages, spouse relocation and new schools for children. As a result, for many working practitioners, the traditional face-to-face master's-level program is simply out of reach.

Some universities have tried to accommodate these issues by offering night classes during the week or offering weekend classes. However, such classes still can mean long commutes, missed classes due to conflicting business obligations and the loss of time spent with family.

These issues become even more complex for international students. Enrolling in a U.S. graduate public relations program is an ambition of many public relations students from countries throughout the world. However, to participate in traditional face-to-face programs, international students must satisfy strict U.S. visa requirements, leave their jobs and home environments and survive economically in the United States under strict limitations on their eligibility for part-time work opportunities and for limited and highly competitive assistantships, fellowships and scholarships.

Other issues also make traditional face-to-face master's-level instruction a poor option. Some universities already are operating over capacity, and adding extra students could stretch parking, housing, dining and other campus resources.

Since classes in traditional graduate programs are factored into faculty workload in the same way as are undergraduate classes, faculty members who teach graduate courses teach fewer undergraduate classes, making it necessary for program administrators to find additional part-time public relations instructors to cover those undergraduate courses. Traditional classroom programs may be limit-

ed to using full- and part-time faculty who are already teaching on campus or who live in close proximity, and, thus, it can become difficult, if not impossible, to recruit competent faculty to teach a class in the program if that individual lives across the country. Finally, recruiting high-caliber adjunct faculty, even those living close to campus, is more difficult if they have to be on campus during regular business hours when they are expected to be in their professional workplace.

A substantial number of public relations master's degree programs that are located in large markets don't face these last two issues. Those markets have high concentrations of senior-level practitioners who possess excellent professional *and* teaching skills, i.e., adjuncts of exceptional quality whom students often cite as being among their best teachers. Those adjuncts often are fully able and motivated to teach face-to-face evening courses. (Evening courses are, of course, a necessity for programs having large numbers of fully or partially employed students.) However, these same adjuncts might find it impossible to take the time during the day, when they most often must work in their primary jobs, to develop online courses.

Delivering Master's-Level Education Online

The emergence of online master's degree programs in public relations would appear to be the antidote to these drawbacks of traditional programs, especially for the working professional and/or the international student. While the 2011 Commission study identified only eight online graduate programs in public relations and communication management in the United States, there is every indication that this is a growth area, and the propo-

nents of online programs are enthusiastic about the potential.

Larry Parnell (2011, October), who administers the strategic public relations graduate program — with both traditional and online options — at George Washington University, is one of those proponents and cites data from the U.S. Department of Education as the most significant reason.

He cites a study during the academic year 2007–2008 by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), “The Condition of Education” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011, May), that found about 4.3 million undergraduates — or about 20 percent of all undergraduates — had taken at least one distance (online) education course. For graduate students, the percentage is higher: 800,000 (or 22 percent) of all graduate students took at least one online course during 2007–2008, and 9 percent of all graduate students completed their entire programs online in the same year. The most common fields of study for these graduate students were business/management (earning a Master of Business Administration [MBA] degree), followed by health and the humanities and the liberal arts. Even though the DOE did not separate out public relations/communication as a field of study, online study of public relations seems to be growing in popularity. One U.S. program described in the Commission’s review reported an increase from 30 students in its first year of offering an online program to 200 students five years later.

A study conducted at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism suggests that there is great potential for online courses and programs among the schools accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education

in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). These schools often are home to public relations programs. Nevertheless, according to Laura Castaneda (2011, Winter), who directs the distance learning programs at Annenberg, the development of online programs at these journalism-based schools is hindered by such factors as faculty skepticism, a lack of technological know-how, a lack of faculty commitment and a lack of support within the schools themselves.

Castaneda said other negatives identified by critics of online programs are the time and expense in developing and delivering online programs, the high degree of self-sufficiency needed by the students, the heightened potential for abusing academic integrity and the low financial and professional rewards for faculty, especially for those seeking tenure.

Some faculty members resist online teaching because it often requires learning new technologies to deliver the content to students. Online classes tend to require not only significant time investments to prepare (also the case with traditional classroom courses), but also a great deal of time online communicating with students and grading students’ participation.

Despite these drawbacks, Castaneda and others see that online programs can maintain or increase enrollment (or replace enrollment when certain programs experience drop-offs). Online programs can reach new or expand existing markets, particularly the adult student or working professional. Castaneda reports that some colleges and universities with a long tradition of using distance learning to reach rural populations are experiencing a greater urgency to add new programs or are facing mandates from their central

administrations or state officials to accelerate the movement in this direction. "Survival" is the one-word reason given by one of her survey participants, reflecting the pressure to find and open new markets, especially from among nontraditional students.

Marketing, telemarketing, advertising and sales techniques are increasingly being used to boost master's degree initiatives, particularly online programs. Even a cursory glance at public relations trade publications, e-newsletters and e-blasts to subscribers reveal robust university budgets being applied to promoting master's degree programs for working professionals.

Castaneda (2011, Winter) reports on another new phenomenon in graduate public relations education: journalism schools and programs are hiring outside vendors to develop online certificates and degree programs under a revenue-sharing agreement.

Observers of this new business model report evidence of overly aggressive telemarketing outreach to prospective students; even a casual request for a catalog or brochure by a potential student can trigger an ongoing series of follow-up emails and phone calls from "academic advisers." In another mash-up of marketing and pedagogy, faculty at one school grew concerned when the commercial vendor urged curriculum changes to make the program more appealing to prospective students in ways the faculty felt lowered their academic standards and requirements. Other schools admit that marketing pressures have led to altering long-held standards, most commonly the elimination of the GRE or GMAT as a criterion for admission.

While the benefits of online programs are attractive, especially to busy working professionals, a 2011 study by *Bulldog Reporter* in

its Online Graduate Programs for Communicators Buyer's Guide attempted to assist potential graduates to find their way among a myriad of programs. The guide provides the potential applicant with a list of questions to ask before enrolling. They include:

- How valuable will employers find your degree?
- Does your existing work experience justify an advanced degree?
- Are you committed to the academic rigor of a master's program?
- Which program specialties and focus (skills versus theory) fit your goals?
- Do you want a strictly online program or a hybrid?
- What is the learning experience; how does your work get done?
- What will it take to make the grade — a thesis, a project?
- How qualified is your faculty — and can you get to them?
- What kind of classmates will you be studying with and learning from?
- Will my online master's degree help me meet my career goals, and is the investment worth it?
- What do students and alumni say about your prospective program? (Sullivan, 2011)

While the Commission's 2011 program review did not identify any graduate public relations or communication management programs being offered by for-profit institutions, this is an area that deserves continued scrutiny. Iowa's U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, a critic of for-profit schools on many levels, quotes U.S. Department of Education statistics to show the dramatic growth in enrollment in

a relatively short period of time. “Between 1998 and 2008, the number of students attending for-profit schools has grown from 553,000 to 1.8 million, an increase of more than 225 percent” (Harkin, nd). Harkin and others claim that for-profit schools spend heavily on television advertisements, billboards, phone solicitation and Web marketing; their costs are far more expensive than at comparable community colleges or public universities; they fail to provide the support systems needed for students to succeed; and their students account for nearly 50 percent of all student loan defaults. According to a special issue on “Online Learning” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “as online learning spreads throughout higher education, so have calls for quality control and assessment. Accrediting groups are scrambling to keep up, and Congress and government officials continue to scrutinize the high student-loan default rates and aggressive recruiting tactics of some for-profit, mostly online, colleges” (Kelderman, 2011, November 11, p. B5).

Delivering a Blended/Hybrid Master’s Degree

While respondents to the Commission’s 2011 survey clearly preferred the traditional model of delivery for public relations master’s degree programs, the No. 2 choice of many respondents was the blended/hybrid model, also known as “blended” education. Four of the 75 graduate programs identified in the Commission’s 2011 program review follow this delivery model.

The blended/hybrid teaching model is commonly used in business as well as in academic settings. It is a mixture of classroom and online instruction that has many trainers, educators and students proclaiming its benefits.

Blended/hybrid courses blend face-to-face instruction with online learning and customarily involve the online delivery of curricular materials, access to resources, submission of assignments, project-based learning, activities that support higher-order thinking and online discussions that may be asynchronous or synchronous. For a class to be considered a blended/hybrid, some student learning must occur online with a percentage of in-class time forfeited to make up for the time.

Proponents say that blended/hybrid learning is an effective and efficient way of expanding course content that supports in-depth delivery and analysis of knowledge (Young, 2002); that it increases student satisfaction (Wu and Hiltz, 2004); and that, in years to come, hybrid learning is poised to cause a paradigm shift in higher education (Allen and Seaman, 2003; Young, 2002). Looking at the full spectrum of education, the North American Council for Online Learning predicts that “blended learning [hybrid], combining the best elements of online and face-to-face education, is likely to emerge as the predominant teaching model of the future” (Watson, 2008, p. 4).

Much of the instructional technology research has focused on totally online learning experiences. Significantly less attention has been paid to hybrid learning, although Allen and Seaman (2003) say that the rate of growth of hybrid learning was exceeding that of fully online programs.

Blended/hybrid learning has been shown to address the frustrations and limitations of online learning resulting from the separation of teacher and student. That portion of learning that takes place in a classroom has the capability to build a community of learners who

also meet online. The personal relationships built during the classroom period can sustain the group during the online phase and into the future as the students become alumni. On the other hand, possible negatives are the additional time and cost of traveling to reach the on-site location.

Accreditation Issues in Delivering Master's Degree Education

Since graduate education in public relations has just recently become a separate focus of accrediting organizations, most master's-level programs that have been examined to date have been vetted through essentially the same standards used for undergraduate programs. Specific standards for graduate programs are still a work in progress. Also, accreditation standards that have long applied to traditionally delivered programs — including quality of curriculum and instruction; quality of faculty; the balance between full- and part-time instructors; the faculty/student ratio; the quality of student services, resources, facilities and equipment; and assessment — may need to be modified so they can be applied to the programs that serve students enrolled in blended/hybrid and on-line delivery formats. Even then, many of the programs that were studied for this Commission report hadn't undergone any accrediting process because accreditation/certification is voluntary, not required.

According to an in-depth look at issues of online learning by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the U.S. Department of Education has issued new regulations to keep distance educators in check and has pressured the groups that accredit colleges and universities to keep a tighter rein on those that offer online courses. Members of the U.S. Congress blame accreditors for lax oversight of online programs that

have engaged in alleged fraud and deception (Kelderman, 2011, November, B4).

The Chronicle of Higher Education's Kelderman responded: "Accreditors counter that they are adapting to the fast-growing world of on-line education by requiring colleges to prove that students learn as much in distance courses as in face-to-face classes. Doubts about the merit of online education are less about quality and more about the business practices of for-profit colleges, the accreditors say. Because of that, they argue that their agencies are being asked to regulate issues outside their domain" (Kelderman, 2011, November, p. B4).

Recommendations

- Each of the models for delivering graduate public relations education clearly has its own pros and cons. But the growth of blended/hybrid and online programs — and the potential for commercial programs entering into the public relations and communication arena — makes it imperative that the educational institutions offering these programs adhere to the highest standards and that prospective students do their own due diligence in choosing any graduate program.
- Regardless of delivery model, the values of graduate-level education require rigorous programs that provide students with in-depth understanding, advanced knowledge, scholarly competence and an appreciation of inquiry and discovery.
- Graduate-level education is not a repetition of skills learned in undergraduate professional programs, nor is it a loose collection of guest speakers and workshops.

- All faculty — full-time and adjunct — should set high standards for their students (and their own delivery of content) so that, at the end of a master's program, students are able to:
 - Contribute to the public relations profession.
 - Transmit knowledge to the next generation.
 - Conduct research and creative projects.
 - Apply theories and best practices in everyday work.
 - Serve the profession and, ultimately, society.
-

Resources Needed for a Master's Degree Program in Public Relations

Faculty Credentials, Recruitment and Promotion/Tenure

While the preferred academic qualification for teaching public relations at most colleges and universities generally continues to be a Ph.D. degree, the Commission recommends that universities ensure that their faculty who teach in public relations master's programs represent a balance

of professional experience, emphasizing strategic public relations practice and theoretical understanding so that quality teaching, research and creative productions can come from the total faculty, regardless of whether all have doctoral degrees.

Accrediting agencies such as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), students, and some colleges and universities prefer faculty members who have substantial and significant practitioner experience — in some cases in addition to a doctorate. (Some institutions accept senior-level public relations experience as the equivalent of a master's or even a doctoral degree.)

The Commission's 2011 qualitative research found that practitioners and educators disagreed about the ideal credentials of public relations graduate faculty. Educators tended to prefer academic credentials. Practitioners were more practice-oriented, concerned that

too many of the current public relations faculty who teach in master's degree programs have minimal professional experience in public relations.

The Commission recognizes these differing preferences, but encourages practitioners and educators to urge colleges, universities and fellow public relations practitioners to respect both practice and theory and to encourage programs to have faculty that represent a balanced blend of both. The Commission recommends that all faculty teaching in master's degree programs have professional experience and remain professionally engaged, in addition to their academic credentials, so they not only understand the theoretical framework of the practice of public relations, but also how that theory is applied in contemporary situations.

Several organizations such as The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations and the Advertising Educational Foundation offer pro-

grams for faculty members to work during the summer in public relations firms/agencies, in public relations departments of corporations and other organizations and in advertising agencies, providing modest stipends to help faculty with their living expenses. Whenever possible, universities should offer faculty grants or released time to complete internships. Other methods of gaining professional experience include consulting and volunteering as well as staying closely engaged with full-time practitioners through professional organizations, externships and research.

Some universities and colleges have partnerships with firms/agencies and corporations that provide faculty with the opportunity to gain current experience in public relations and to provide practitioners with the opportunity to team-teach or serve as “practitioners-in-residence.” For example, using a framework developed by the Council of Public Relations Firms, some universities have established partnerships with local public relations firms to team-teach agency management courses with full-time public relations professors.

In addition to doctoral degrees in public relations or in a relevant communication or business discipline and professional public relations experience, the Commission recommends that faculty obtain professional credentials from professional organizations. Such designations include APR (Accredited in Public Relations) from the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) and ABC (Accredited in Business Communication) from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). To maintain these accreditation credentials, faculty members must engage in ongoing professional development that will keep their professional knowledge fresh and up-to-date.

Additionally, public relations faculty should possess a broad knowledge of communication, behavioral sciences and business. In addition, considerable cultural and historical knowledge, as well as knowledge of and experience with globalization, are needed. Faculty should have mastered the same competencies that they expect their students to learn as their students complete master’s degree programs.

All public relations faculty members, regardless of their academic credentials, should engage in professional development programs through professional societies, media organizations and other venues. In addition, public relations faculty should be leading professional development programs to share their research findings and expertise with others. Too often, research conducted by public relations faculty is not shared beyond academic conferences and scholarly publications.

Sharing this information in programs and media targeted to practitioners will help increase practitioner confidence that public relations educators are “tuned in” to modern public relations practice. The challenge to public relations faculty is to ensure their research projects advance not only public relations theories, but also the practice of public relations, much the same way in which medical school faculty members advance modern medicine. Likewise, all public relations faculty members should stay abreast of trends and theory related to practice by reading professional/trade and scholarly journals, as well as other published resources.

A challenge facing most colleges and universities is to ensure that appointment, promotion and tenure policies that apply to public relations faculty support a variety of faculty backgrounds and approaches to scholarship.

To expand the public relations body of knowledge, public relations faculty should produce and publish research, not only in refereed journals, but also in books and other publications that appeal to practitioners.

It also is critical that the contributions of public relations faculty members who complete creative projects and productions on behalf of clients are accepted as part of their qualifications for tenure and promotion. Regardless of the approach to scholarship and the academic preparation of a faculty member, colleges and universities must ensure that all faculty members have the same opportunities for advancement.

Faculty Recommendations

The Commission encourages universities to be open to unique qualifications of individual faculty members and to recognize that an individual faculty member may not possess every desired criterion. However, the entire public relations faculty of the academic unit should be diverse and represent the breadth of experience and scholarship necessary to deliver a quality professional master's program.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that, regardless of mode of delivery (traditional classroom, Web-facilitated, blended/hybrid or online), faculty hired for full-time positions should:

- Preferably have a Ph.D. (doctoral) degree and professional experience. In most cases, a master's degree and professional experience should be the minimum acceptable credentials, recognizing that there may be cases where a truly top-level practitioner can contribute through teaching.
- Have professional credentials provided by a widely recognized professional society.

- Be engaged in ongoing professional development in both academic and practitioner environments, which might include grant writing or participating in funded projects.

To help address the shortage of public relations faculty, particularly with the anticipated retirement of numerous tenured faculty members in the remaining years of this decade, colleges and universities offering master's degree programs in public relations should begin mentoring talented students in their master's degree programs to earn doctoral degrees *and* to acquire significant professional experience. Ideally, the mentoring could begin even earlier with talented undergraduate students. Likewise, highly experienced practitioners may want to consider a second career as a public relations educator; they, too, must be mentored and educated about how to teach (Luke, 2010, July; Senese, F. D., 2008, Summer).

Additionally, public relations educators and practitioners should encourage public relations students from traditionally under-represented groups, such as Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans, to consider careers as public relations educators. Other talent pools to consider in attempting to diversify the ranks of public relations educators in the United States are practitioners and international students. With support to improve these international students' English-language speaking and writing when necessary, these candidates may bring unique global perspectives.

PRSA's Educators Academy offers a "Learning to Teach" workshop and a "Learning to Teach" publication (Sallot and DeSanto, 2004) to help practitioners and new faculty

members transition smoothly into the academy. Professional practitioners who become faculty members must recognize that teaching is more than sharing stories from their professional careers and inviting a series of guest lecturers to share their experiences. Faculty members must become proficient in multiple approaches to public relations pedagogy and adept at teaching with technology.

For those exploring teaching online or blended/hybrid courses, faculty members should obtain certificates and credentials demonstrating competencies in those technologies.

This Commission fully supports a caution voiced by the 2006 Commission: that public relations teaching should not be viewed as an easy segue into retirement. Many colleges and universities require all faculty members to contribute to public relations scholarship through grants, published research and creative activities/production in addition to teaching and service to the unit and the profession.

Therefore, as new public relations faculty members are recruited, senior public relations faculty members should mentor them and coach them through how they can successfully meet academic performance expectations.

Financial, Facilities and Marketing Support

Many graduate programs in public relations are relatively new, and shrinking college and university budgets have resulted in thin resources, often inadequate for public relations graduate education. Also, very few, if any, graduate programs are completely independent; most are housed within a larger academic unit such as a school of communication, a school of journalism/mass com-

munication or a graduate school. Increased resources beyond the minimal level provided by their institutions would improve the programs' responsiveness to the profession and accelerate advancement of their quality and output. Collaboration and negotiating skills, therefore, are critical for educators teaching in these programs.

Financial and Facilities Recommendations

- Increased autonomy for facilities and budget management is critical. Public relations programs need to be able to make their own decisions to tailor the resources they have to the needs of their students and the profession.
- Substantial opportunities exist for graduate programs in public relations to attract funding from the private sector for fellowships, scholarships, faculty chairs and internship opportunities for students. However, contributions to public relations education from both individuals and organizations continue to lag far behind other disciplines such as business, journalism and marketing.
- Academic units should provide support for global initiatives such as travel grants, international internships, international faculty and international students. Often, international students and students from under-represented groups need additional support to help them acclimate to the campus community in the United States.

When vying for often-limited resources on campus, units and their external supporters must insist that colleges and universities support these programs consistently and not just during times of accreditation and/or certification visits. While some universities

have found offering online courses and degree programs to be lucrative, units offering such programs of study must fully fund the technology, technical support and training of faculty that would make program operation most effective.

Another resource consideration is funding for assessment efforts. Units are being required to achieve accreditation by regional accrediting bodies that accredit their entire college or university (such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), which reviews academic units as a whole rather than reviews individual programs; and PRSA's Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR)) to demonstrate that they are achieving learning outcomes. Planning and implementing valid and reliable assessment programs that involve both direct measures and indirect measures is costly, but must be supported. Faculty leading such efforts should be given released time and staff support to collect and analyze assessment data.

Furthermore, budgets should be aligned with the number of students and faculty members, as well as with the curriculum, ensuring that adequate supplies and technical and human resources are available.

Collaboration with other programs also can enhance fundraising considerably. Opportunities should be explored to develop joint proposals and programs with other graduate programs and schools.

Marketing Support Recommendations

- Master's degree programs in public relations should use marketing techniques and tools to attract top

students and to compete with other graduate academic programs that have better-established value, particularly MBA programs.

- Public relations employers need to be better educated about the value of the master's degree. Master's degree programs need to show public relations employers that public relations master's degree graduates are well-prepared to enter the workforce in higher-level positions than are those of entry-level employees. But marketing resources are severely limited, and sharing them among a number of other academic programs is the rule rather than the exception.

As a result, public relations program directors sometimes "stand in line" for marketing resources — often behind larger, better-supported programs. Master's degree programs in public relations would benefit from increased independence in the development and management of their marketing communication programs.

Recommended marketing activities include, at a minimum, websites, social and mainstream media visibility (for the program, its professors and students), and recognition of faculty and students in awards competitions. Many programs also produce direct mail campaigns, newsletters and other promotional materials. Some use advertising campaigns to promote their graduate programs, but this is not a widespread tactic because of the cost of advertising.

Some programs participate in conferences — such as the PRSA International Conference — with information booths. Virtually all hold information sessions for prospective students.

Internships/Work Experience/Practica, Technology and Research Tools

The recommendations in this section are applicable both to programs that are primarily academic and to those that are professionally oriented. The recommendations encompass three aspects of graduate programs:

1. Internships/work experience/practica
2. Technology
3. Research tools

Internship/Work Experience/Practica Recommendations

Internships, work experience and practica are essential components of professional graduate education because they help students to apply professional skills that they have already learned and to acquire new and emerging skills demanded by employers. Master's degree students who are already working in public relations often could benefit from work experiences that would allow them to experience higher-level strategic practice.

One of the challenges of completing a master's degree program in public relations (as in many related fields) is the risk that extended, intense coursework and class time, while invaluable to the student's educational preparation, also can erode current relevancy and job experience if practical skills and training are not maintained along the way.

In the words of the graduate coordinator for one university's public relations program:

Gaining job experience is paramount. Having a graduate degree with no job experience doesn't help you any more than having an undergraduate degree with no job experience, unless you are interested in a specialized area that requires additional research skills." (Walton, 2009, May)

This point is underscored by the Commission's 2011 survey of educators and practitioners, which revealed that completing a comprehensive project similar in rigor to job experience was the most highly regarded capstone experience of graduate public relations education.

Technology Recommendations

Students should not only know how to use social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, but also how to apply critical thinking to the selection, implementation and evaluation of such tools in achieving client or employer goals.

Employers have ever-increasing expectations of master's degree graduates' ability to use technology. A 2011 white paper published by PRSA, "The Public Relations Professional of 2015," noted:

The public relations professional increasingly needs to have technical knowledge about how the Web and new Web-based applications work. As print media continues (sic) to decline, it's becoming more essential to broaden skills and knowledge to include segments such as SEO strategies and basic HTML coding. (*The Public Relations Professional of 2015*, 2011, September, p. 10)

While it is not the primary purpose of a graduate curriculum to teach students to Tweet or blog or to understand SEO (search engine optimization), the proper resources must be in place to ensure that graduate students have the tools to support these skills.

Research Tools Recommendations

The resources provided for graduate student research should enable an understanding of using research tools and systems, applying ethical and procedural guidelines in research and using tools designed specifically for

measurement and evaluation. As noted in the Standards for Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR), "Technology should be current and comparable to that used in the field" (Guidelines 2011 certification in public relations education, 2011, p. 3).

Overarching Resource Recommendations

For internship/work experience/practica

- Practicum and/or internship coordinator.
- Maintenance of current listing of high-quality potential internship and practicum clients.
- Templates or rubrics for defining minimum standards for — and evaluation of — final culminating projects.
- Course descriptions for internships and practica.
- Standards, templates and evaluation guidelines for final projects.
- Professional advisers/evaluators for culminating projects.
- Standardized expectations of both student and employer/client during an internship or practicum.

For ensuring technological prowess

- Current technological resources in classrooms and other learning facilities.
- Budget allocations comparable to similar academic programs.
- Regular inspection and maintenance of equipment and facilities.
- Internet access.
- Access to Blackboard, Moodle or similar interactive course-management systems.
- Access to publishing and other software used frequently in public relations

(Microsoft Office, Adobe Creative Suite, InDesign, Flash, Adobe iMovie, etc.).

- Access to media tracking and monitoring tools and systems (e.g., Vocus, Cision).
- Access to multimedia production facilities.
- Access to programs for creating and sharing online portfolios.

For supporting students' research

- Access to and instruction in using multiple research systems and resources, including online systems such as LexisNexis, ProQuest and Factiva.
- Online access to and knowledge of tutorials for how to use library resources and holdings.
- Instruction in measurement and evaluation capabilities.
- Access to scholarships, grants and other financial aid.
- Access to and instruction in how to use qualitative research software.
- Access to and understanding of tools for running statistical tests on data.
- Access to and instruction in using online survey software.

For supporting students' professional development

- Access to and interaction with professional organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), Council of Public Relations Firms, the International Association of Business Communicators, the Institute for Public Relations and the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management.

The Master's Degree Interface Between Educators and Practitioners

The “state of the union” is not good between educators and practitioners in master’s degree education in public relations. But it surely can be improved with commitment from both of these critical cohorts of the public relations profession.

The base from which the academy and the practice can build a more effective interface must be the conclusions generated by the Commission’s 2011 research presented in this 2012 report. In qualitative interviews with 21 senior-level public relations executives — CEOs, managing partners or directors, vice presidents and chief communications officers — Commission researchers found only what they termed “lukewarm support” for master’s degree programs.

The research also revealed a considerable disconnect between practitioners and educators regarding the balance between theory and research and between strategy and tactical and technical knowledge and skills. Practitioners also questioned the credentials of many who teach in public relations master’s degree programs; they felt that more practitioners should be engaged in teaching in these programs and that too many full-time faculty lacked professional experience.

Practitioners voiced a concern over what they perceived as the similarity of bachelor’s and master’s degree public relations curricula, the variety of titles and requirements in the 75 master’s programs that were reviewed in the 2011 Commission research and insufficient “brand identity” for the master’s degree in general and for individual programs as well.

More anecdotally, it is clear that educators, too, are concerned about the interface be-

tween the practice and the academy. They bemoan the apparent low regard of their master’s degree programs among public relations employers — especially the employers’ apparent perception that those graduates who are seeking to enter (or re-enter) the workforce cannot contribute substantively to organizational success. As a result, educators are taking measures to improve these perceptions.

Interface Recommendations

In the interest of the future of the public relations profession — and of the students, educators, practitioners, organizations and society that public relations serves — the Commission suggests a range of early interactions:

- Collaboration with leaders of the profession who might provide ongoing counsel to public relations educators and their programs. For example, a preliminary discussion with Arthur W. Page Society representatives gives promise of a fruitful relationship that is consistent with the Page Society’s programs such as “The Authentic Enterprise” and “The New Model.”
- Encouraging and helping prepare practitioners to teach. Pedagogy, guidelines and desired characteristics for success in the classroom can be presented to qualified practitioners and, it is hoped, can attract many more practitioners to teach part-time or even to begin a second full-time career as a public relations educator.

Current economic conditions and other factors have increased institutional interest in hiring practitioners as full-time or part-time faculty.

- Temporary, often single-course, special programs, such as visiting distinguished

professionals and professionals-in-residence, should be explored by a greater number of college and university academic programs.

- Practitioners and educators can work together when they volunteer for, and undertake, site visits/recommendations for the PRSA Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) program.
- Practitioners might well increase support for programs like The Betsy Plank Educator Fellowship Program, which brings educators and practitioners together in the professional workplace for two weeks each summer.
- Educators can increase the involvement of local and regional practitioners in a variety of interactions: giving guest lectures, coaching and advising on projects in development, reviewing capstone courses, sponsoring practica and internships and serving as designated practitioner advisers to programs or to student organizations such as the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and student-run public relations firms.
- Practitioners can use master's degree students in "fast turnaround" research projects. Such use could contribute to the vitally needed improvement in educator understanding of what kinds of research are useful in the practice and not only would help strengthen the interface between practitioners and educators, but also would move the profession in the direction of other professions in which research is more directly applied in practice.

The Commission acknowledges that many universities require terminal degrees, i.e.,

Ph.D. degrees, or at minimum master's degrees, to teach graduate courses; also, not all public relations practitioners are suited to provide master's degree instruction or to advise on curricula. Therefore, the Commission offers guidelines and desired characteristics for practitioners who participate in master's degree education. Practitioners who participate in public relations master's degree education should exhibit:

- Respect for the scholarly and theoretical foundations of public relations.
- Genuine interest in sharing learning.
- Significant strategic public relations experience.
- Education beyond the undergraduate level.
- Strong research experience.
- Familiarity with current technologies, issues, trends and expectations of the contemporary public relations workplace.
- An interest in becoming proficient in pedagogy.

The Commission also acknowledges that not all students in master's degree programs in public relations are sufficiently prepared to conduct research of value to practitioners. Therefore, it recommends steps to help public relations master's degree programs leverage educator and practitioner collaboration in the mutual interest of increasing the number of successful research programs:

- A process of introducing master's-level research projects into classes and/or practica.
- A process for finding research partners for student research projects, perhaps

in outreach for proposals through a master's-level internship director or practicum supervisor.

- Campus outreach to and networking with other institutions and groups that may need relevant research assistance.
- Creation or expansion of research laboratories to serve as a home for

an increased number of research opportunities available to master's degree students.

With educators and practitioners who are willing to undertake such initiatives may come a mindset in the profession to conceive of, and implement, still other constructive "interface" efforts.



A Global Perspective on Master's Degree Curriculum Standards

Introduction and Context

Public relations is a global profession that reflects a global economy and a desire to relate to and communicate with global audiences. As a professionalized occupation, it is more than a century old throughout most of the world. The body of knowledge in public relations — originally

created largely, but not exclusively, in the United States — has seen a steady increase in contributions from scholars in Europe, Africa, Oceania, Asia and Latin America. It is estimated that today fewer than one quarter of the 2.5 to 3 million public relations professionals in the world practice in the United States (Muzy Falconi, 2003).

Educators and practitioners cannot escape the reality that analysis and careful consideration of territorial social and economic infrastructures, customs and cultural dimensions are crucial to ensure successful public relations outcomes. However, these considerations too often are overlooked in the execution of campaigns and in managing issues on a global scale.

Broadly speaking, the shift from a paradigm of one-way communication to many-way relationships with stakeholders is gaining ground as old fiefdoms of gatekeeping, message control and monopoly of knowledge are

breaking down throughout the world, albeit at varying degrees and with different levels of enthusiasm. New approaches to public relations come from public relations schools of thought based in Europe, Australia, Africa and elsewhere throughout the world and are widely recognized among U.S. scholars.

Establishing global curriculum standards is a complex undertaking with many points of view and differences, as well as commonalities in the ways in which the practice of public relations is being approached. This Commission was composed of eminent practitioners and educators from North America, Europe, Australia and Indonesia. While the Commission's previous reports and standards were originally intended to serve as a baseline for North American educational institutions, there is evidence that the standards in the Commission's two previous reports, i.e., October 1999 and November 2006, transcended borders and were adopted by col-

leges and universities throughout the world. As the practice of public relations becomes increasingly global, it is likely that the standards and recommendations of this report also will transcend borders and will serve as a starting point for graduate program curriculum development across the globe.

Current Challenges

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 2600 standards for all communications professions also will reflect this Commission's standards. Preliminary work likely will be released in 2012 in France and in Canada (Quebec), two countries that have volunteered to lead the development of such standards. The United States and the United Kingdom are expected to follow suit within a year. ISO standards in the past have been widely adopted once launched; therefore, this is a development to be watched closely because it might well affect several aspects of public relations practice on a global scale. Yet, much work is still needed to make sure that global standards for the profession are accepted and recognized across the world. This, in part, was the impetus in 2000 to form the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA) as an umbrella organization that currently represents all leading national public relations professional associations representing approximately 170,000 members throughout the world. The Global Alliance has set precedents in establishing global standards, and the Commission believes that the process the Global Alliance followed to develop and adopt global standards for master's-level graduate education — following the paradigm of generic principles and specific examples provided by the Global Alliance — could offer a path to global curriculum standards.

Progress Toward Global Standards on Curriculum

The pursuit of a world standard for public relations curricula at colleges and universities has proven to be a long-term proposition that led to the Global Alliance's partnership with the Commission to conduct more research based on the findings of the Global Alliance's first research project in 2008 to explore global curriculum standards.

That research report, based on an extensive literature review, outlined several issues — principally cultural factors — that needed to be addressed before the Global Alliance could recommend global curriculum standards. The research demonstrated another fundamental trait of the state of the public relation profession: the willingness of practitioners and educators to work across borders to redefine the practice and to continue to develop and test theories that encompass both unity and diversity. One of the highlights of the Global Alliance's "Towards a Global Curriculum" (Tench and Deflagbe, 2008, February) emphasizes that education is critical to establishing public relations as a profession. Further, with a merging economy, a global perspective in public relations that highlights a planning attitude will require some standardization of shared practices worldwide that education can and should address, along with clarification of what public relations and communication management can — and cannot — do for an organization. Building on this research, the Global Alliance and the Commission on Public Relations Education teamed up to produce "A First Look: An In-Depth Analysis of Global Public Relations Education" (Toth and Aldoory, 2010, March). This report analyzed curricula in public relations posted on the websites of more than 218 institutions in 39 countries covering

five continents. Based on this first phase, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with public relations educators in 20 of those countries.

The key findings of this study were:

- Public relations is generally defined as a strategic function for building and maintaining relationships.
- Undergraduate programs are designed to prepare future practitioners.
- Curricula frequently reflect the five-course undergraduate standard suggested in the Commission on Public Relations Education's November 2006 report, "The Professional Bond."
- Important cultural distinctions often are embedded within programs.
- Barriers to development of "the ideal public relations program" include resources, country system of government, country culture, program structure and inadequate or ineffective relationships with practicing professionals.
- Graduate programs emphasize advanced theory and strategic thinking and sometimes showcase research and theory standards in use in other parts of the world.

Canadian Curriculum Standards

A different perspective on establishing global curriculum standards emerged in 2012 when the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) unveiled its own version of curriculum standards by publishing a white paper with curriculum guidelines: "Pathways to the Profession — An overview: A new relationship for CPRS and educators" (2011, June). These guidelines use an integrated program-planning model that includes an emphasis on

program outcomes along with recommendations for a course framework. This approach also offers educational institutions a way to assess their own programs and provides a context for ongoing and future curriculum development at all levels, from the basic certificate to advanced education. The program establishes five pathways to the public relations profession:

- Technical
- Career
- Management
- Leadership
- Scholar

The outcomes-based approach of "Pathways to the Profession" has garnered interest from many academicians throughout the world. Based on three years of extensive consultations, it is expected that a majority of educational institutions in Canada that offer public relations curricular and degree programs will apply for formal recognition based on "The Pathways" program. The first cohort (three) of programs was recognized as achieving these new standards in June 2012.

Other Developments

Today, educators and practitioners in many countries actively discuss the importance of establishing educational standards for undergraduate and graduate educational programs. Some discussions are organized with support from national professional associations (Indonesia), others by leading academic institutions in the country (Brazil).

In many countries, however, the standards for any program, undergraduate or graduate, are officially developed and verified by the Ministry of Higher Education (in Romania, Russia and Ukraine, to name a few). In these

countries, it is important for practitioners and educators to work closely together to develop recommendations for the Ministry to consider. As a result, in many of these countries, an ongoing discussion between members of professional associations and educators can be particularly fruitful, although challenging.

For instance, the Russian Public Relations Society (RASO) has a working group of professionals who develop practical recommendations on how to improve the quality of public relations programs in the country. The group works closely with educators to incorporate RASO's suggestions into the academic curricula across the country. At the same time, Russian educators have a National Association of Public Relations Educators (APSO) that holds business meetings and an-

nual conferences to share programs, experiences and curricula and to develop strategies to communicate educators' concerns and suggestions to the Ministry of Higher Education on how to improve nationally established program standards.

The Global Way Forward

Based on past experience with recommending curriculum frameworks, the Commission suggests that educators and practitioners in countries other than the United States consider the impact and applicability of these U.S. recommendations to their own graduate programs. The Commission offers its recommendations as a basis for adopting at least some common core elements to ensure consistency as educators and practitioners work together toward truly global curriculum standards.



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Appendix 1

Review of Websites of Master's Degree Programs in Public Relations

The following list of 75 universities and colleges was selected for review using the following criteria: (1) they identified themselves on their websites as having graduate programs in public relations; (2) they were identified as having graduate programs in public relations through the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) directory or in *Where to Study Public Relations*, 2011; (3) they used such titles for their graduate programs as public relations, strategic communication, strategic public relations management, or communication management; (4) they had websites describing their graduate programs; (5) they advertised their graduate public relations programs in trade publications. Data collection occurred between June and October of 2011.

American University	Grambling State University	Radford University
Auburn University	High Point University	Rowan University
Austin Peay State University	Indiana University–Indianapolis	Seton Hall University
Ball State University	Iona College	St. Cloud State University
Boston University	John Carroll University	Suffolk University
California State University–Fullerton	Johns Hopkins University	Syracuse University (Communication Management)
Columbia University	Kent State University	Syracuse University (Public Relations)
DePaul University	La Salle University	Temple University
Duquesne University	Lasell College	Texas Christian University
Drexel University	Marquette University	Texas State University–San Marcos
Eastern Tennessee State University	Marist College	Towson University
Emerson College	Michigan State University	University of Alabama
Farleigh Dickinson University	New York University	University of Arkansas
Florida International University	Northeastern University	University of Colorado–Denver
Fordham University	Northwestern University	University of Denver
George Mason University	Point Park University	University of Florida
Georgetown University	Purdue University	
George Washington University	Quinnipiac University	

Appendix 1

University of Georgia	University of Northern Iowa	Villanova University
University of Hartford	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	Virginia Commonwealth University
University of Houston	University of Oklahoma	Webster University
University of Kansas	University of Oregon	West Virginia University
University of Louisiana–Lafayette	University of the Pacific	Wichita State University
University of Maryland	University of Portland	
University of Miami	University of Southern California	
University of Minnesota	University of Southern Mississippi	
University of Missouri	University of Tennessee	



Appendix 2

Previous Commission Graduate Curriculum Recommendations

In its 1985 “Advancing Public Relations Education” report, a Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations recommended a curriculum for graduate public relations education. That Commission, established by the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC), based its recommendations on these basic assumptions regarding public relations education at the master’s degree level:

- The purpose of a master’s degree should be to provide education for the management of the public relations function as well as to provide enhancement of critical public relations skills.
- Students should be placed within a problem-solving environment in which they use communication, social and behavioral science theory and research techniques to analyze and solve public relations problems.
- Students should have completed an undergraduate education in public relations (or a closely allied field of communication) or should have practical/professional experience in public relations (or a closely allied field). If not, students should be required to make up significant deficiencies prior to enrolling in a graduate program.

The 1985 Commission recommended a curriculum for graduate students that provides

them with two kinds of skills: (1) basic skills in management decision making (including goal setting, budgeting, planning and organizing), and (2) advanced skills in writing/communication (including skills in design, writing/speaking for media dissemination, media selection and scheduling).

The 1985 Commission recommended courses totaling at least 30 credit hours to deliver these skills:

1. Research and theory core: six credit hours of at least two required courses that include research methods (encompassing experimental and survey research) and communication theory.
2. Communication processes: three credit hours examining processes of communication applied to public relations in inter-organizational theory, persuasion, issue identification and analysis, conflict cooperation assessment and public opinion survey and analysis.

3. Designated public relations courses:

- Public relations principles, practices and theory (three credit hours)
- Public relations management (three credit hours)
- Public relations programming and production (three credit hours)
- Public relations specialty option (three credit hours)

4. A minor (six to nine semester hours)

5. Thesis or comprehensive exam (three credit hours)

In November 2006, the Commission on Public Relations Education, with members representing a broad spectrum of academic and professional organizations, recommended content areas that should be mastered beyond an undergraduate level of competency in a master's degree program. In its report, "The Professional Bond," the Commission did not recommend specific courses (as the 1985 Commission had done), but instead recommended these content areas:

- Public relations theory and concepts
- Public relations law
- Public relations ethics
- Global public relations
- Public relations applications
- Public relations management
- Public relations research
- Public relations programming and production

- Public relations publics
- Communication processes
- Management sciences
- Behavioral sciences
- Internship/practicum experience
- Thesis and/or capstone project and/or comprehensive exam

The Commission also recommended three program models that could be used to deliver the knowledge and skills of a master's degree program. All three models assumed that the master's students had an undergraduate degree in public relations or a substantial skills and knowledge foundation in public relations:

- A model that emphasized research design, and methods and communication theories, providing preparation for entering a doctoral program.
- A model that emphasized public relations and management knowledge and skills, particularly basic business practices, providing advanced career preparation.
- A model that emphasized public relations strategies in an interdisciplinary array of required and elective courses.

The Commission recommended that students lacking the requisite undergraduate preparation complete foundational undergraduate courses before entering master's degree programs. It also highly recommended that students entering master's programs have professional public relations experience.

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