

*Fast Forward: Updates on
Public Relations Education*

**SPOTLIGHT
SERIES**

*Public Relations Adjunct Faculty
are a Resource to be Nurtured*

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Public Relations Adjunct Faculty Are a Resource to Be Nurtured

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Public relations adjunct faculty form an important backbone for preparing students for careers in public relations education. Yet, the Commission on Public Relations Education's (CPRE) 2018 *Fast Forward* report includes little information on public relations practitioners who come to academe to teach as contingent or temporary faculty (p. 102). This Spotlight Report, based on original research (CPRE Workgroup, 2019) and a PRSA Educator Academy (2021) webinar, provides important information on who these adjunct teachers are, their positives about teaching, what they need to be successful, and how to make success happen for them.

Public Relations Adjunct Faculty: CPRE Survey Information

Who are the adjunct faculty teaching public relations?

Educators delivering quality public relations education include a very loyal group of adjunct faculty colleagues, according to a CPRE work group survey (2019). While no numbers exist of how many adjuncts teach in higher education public relations programs, overall, in the United States, adjunct professors are estimated to be about 50% of faculty teaching in four-year universities (AAUP, 2018).

Based on a survey conducted by the CPRE Adjunct Work Group (Unpublished data, 2019) the typical public relations adjunct faculty member is a public relations practitioner with 15 years of experience, mostly white, majority male, with a master's degree. They teach in four-year universities, having gotten involved because they were approached by someone. They typically teach one course at a time. Public relations adjuncts stay with teaching—some more than 15 years. (Full demographic study details end this report).

By the numbers, what public relations adjunct faculty say are the positives of teaching.

When asked quantitatively, public relations adjunct faculty reply positively about teaching. They would recommend teaching to a friend. They think that most of their students are good, and they are satisfied with university support. They believe they have the technology support they need. They are satisfied with their involvement in course design. (See Chart 1).

Chart 1: What public relations adjunct faculty are positive about.

- 90% would recommend adjunct teaching to a friend.
 - 95% say that most of their students were good.
 - 75% say they are satisfied with university support.
 - The majority don't see IT as enabling better teaching, but it an essential part of their work.
 - The majority feel university IT is comparable to industry and digital platforms almost as good as industry.
 - 71% say support staff are very helpful.
 - 86% have a say in decisions on *some* course materials.
 - 87% have input into tailoring required class content to their class situations.
 - 50% say faculty assigned to classes based on expertise.
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By the numbers, where public relations adjunct faculty could use more support.

Despite the positives reported in the CPRE survey, the public relations adjuncts report they need more help with the tools of teaching, such as syllabi, samples of assignments and reading lists. Smaller but surprising numbers need more information on classroom teaching, guidance on how to be an adjunct, and guidance from current faculty. Most participants say that as they continued to teach, their needs are met, but 16% are seeking help. (See Chart 2).

Chart 2: While not complaining, they would have liked more:

- 44% want more tools (syllabi, samples, reading lists).
- 16% want information on how to do classroom teaching.
- 14% want guidance on how to be an adjunct –
Onboarding in everything from IT to grading.
- 13% want guidance from current faculty

As they continued to teach:

- 85% say their needs were met.
 - 16% are still seeking help.
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Public relations adjunct faculty had opinions about their relationships with full-time faculty and unionization.

They say all public relations faculty should have practical experience. Most importantly, they want more engagement with full-time faculty. What stands out in the data is adjunct public relations faculty wanting more engagement, not unionization. (See Chart 3).

Chart 3: Public relations adjunct faculty want more engagement.

- 76% think all faculty should have significant experience working in PR.
 - 74% would like to have more engagement with full-time faculty to foster inclusiveness.
 - No strong feelings about:
 - value of a union.
 - feeling looked down on by full-time faculty.
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In Their Own Words Thoughts About Adjunct Teaching

Quantitative survey results tell only half the story. Qualitatively, these adjunct survey participants give a picture of dedicated public relations practitioners who are enthusiastic about teaching and about their students (See Chart 4). On the other hand, they tell of neglect from A to Z—without the critical guidance they need to be successful. Open-ended comments should direct our attention.

Best things about adjunct teaching:

- A foot in both worlds gives me a unique perspective.
- I can translate my current work into the classroom.
- Teaching is fun (once I asked friends who teach at other schools about what to do).
- It keeps me connected with the younger generation, makes me stay current.
- The students!
- I get to teach with no other “BS” academic duties.
- Department chair is very supportive of including adjuncts.
- I encounter bright young minds from around the world – would never have had this opportunity otherwise.

Worst things about adjunct teaching:

- I had to rely on student feedback to learn how to teach.
- I was not even told where to hang my coat.
- It’s hard if you are working and work interferes, never felt I had enough time and if your class is at night, you are ON YOUR OWN.
- Teaching is great. Grading is horrible, and do you edit their work or provide suggestions and have them redo or?
- My grad students were just plain nasty know-it-alls (“why does SPELLING matter?”)
- University doesn’t provide much support for international students so they turn to me and I just can’t do it for 20-25 of them per quarter.

In their own words: NEEDS!

- Teaching sure is different than doing a new biz pitch.
- I got NO guidance from anyone about anything. Date, time, room #
- I needed guidance on teaching foreign students with poor English language skills (still do).
- I had to put my class together from scratch.
- There was no one in the building at night to answer questions.

In their own last words:

- Care needs to be taken in hiring adjuncts. Some great pros just can't teach.
- Would love to connect with adjuncts at other schools.
- If you make rules about attendance, enforce them!
- We all have an obligation to give back and this is a great way.
- Strong union has made all the difference.
- Real world experience does make a difference for students.
- Discovered I had a passion for teaching.
- Schools need us to teach the mass of students they enroll.
- I JUST LOVE TEACHING.
- Thanks for doing this survey!!!!!! Good to know someone cares.

What can public relations educators do to ensure adjunct faculty are successful?

Public relations educators should invest more in preparing and ensuring that their adjunct colleagues have what they need; and in developing their obvious desire to teach. Here are ideas and thought starters (PRSA Educators Academy webinar, 2021).

- Provide training in managing the global classroom, cultural awareness, etc.
- Identify new ways of working/accommodating professional schedules.
- Create more pedagogical infrastructure for adjuncts teaching so that they know how to succeed from the start.
- Create mutually beneficial full-time/adjunct partnerships through curriculum development, etc.
- Provide mentors.
- Recommend shadowing the course before the adjunct teaches it.
- Help adjust adjuncts to online teaching and social distancing in the contemporary classroom.
- Build awareness and usage of university resources (e.g., libraries, database) and student services (e.g., mental health, international support, etc.)
- Be ready by preparing as much as possible ahead of the start of a class.
 - Preparation starts with strategic thinking about the outcomes that students are to achieve; what materials, assignments, quizzes, etc., will be needed to achieve these outcomes; and the metrics to know whether the outcomes were achieved.
 - Teaching requires a change in mindset—from boardroom to classroom requires a different set of skills.

Thought starters for the Commission on Public Relations Education and other educator organizations

Public relations adjunct faculty are a resource to be nurtured with more attention paid to meet their needs. Here are thought starters for the Commission on Public Relations Education and/or in partnership with other professional organizations to pursue.

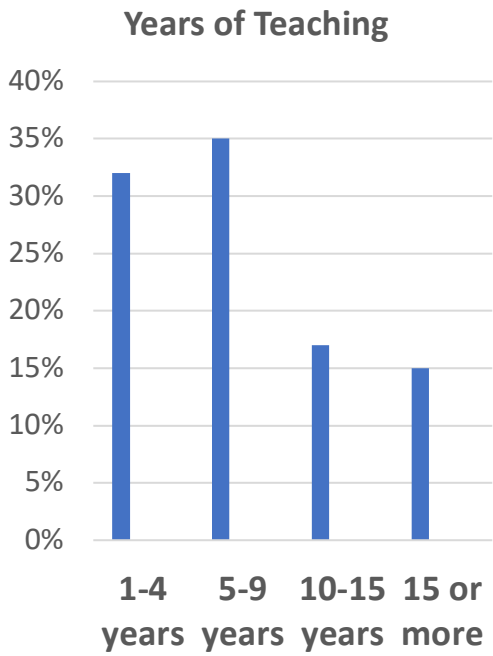
- Build a formal “boot-camp”, “on-boarding” or “online training for adjuncts. A model could be the AACSB/Bridge Program that helps professionals from the corporate world transition to a business school teaching career.
<https://www.aacsb.edu/events/bridgeprogram>
- Build online communities of adjunct public relations faculty.
- Develop and update regularly an adjunct faculty reading list of articles, podcasts, and blogs.
- Provide an adjunct public relations faculty “checklist” of what is expected and what to ask for from administrators.
- Recognize the need for diverse adjunct faculty. This profile highlights the lack of practitioners of color in public relations classrooms.

Survey Methodology

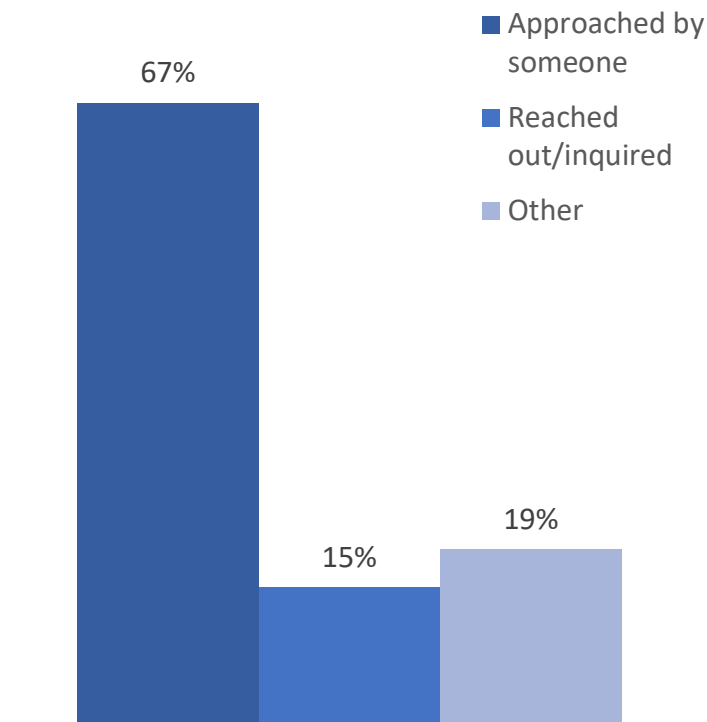
A CPRE work group, composed of John Deats, New York University; Ken Plowman, Brigham Young University; and Debbie Davis, Texas Tech University; with Elizabeth Toth, Maryland, as principal investigator, surveyed public relations adjunct instructors in 2019 to learn about their teaching interests and needs. CPRE board members invited adjunct faculty by email to participate, resulting in a convenience, purposive sample of 94 total participants. The University of Maryland Institutional Review Board approved the CPRE work group survey.

Participants’ Demographic Profile

More than half of the participants (52%) worked fulltime; 22% worked halftime; and 26% were retired. More than half (58%) had 15+ years of public relations practice with more than 30% having taught more than 10 years.



They got involved in teaching in three ways: 67% approached by a friend, colleague or program director; 15% reached out in response to learning about an opening; and 19% came by other paths.



Key Characteristics:

- Slightly more men (55%) than women (44%), with 1% other.
- Predominately master's prepared (55%); 22% bachelor's; 4% Ph.D. or Ed.D., 8% other.
- Not a diverse group: 85% White; 4% Black; 5% Multiple; and 5% Asian.
- Most are senior professionals: 60 or over (46%); 50-59 (19%); 40-49 (17%); 30-39 (13%); 21-29 (5%).
- Significant PR experience before teaching: 15+ years (58%); 10-15 years (17%); 5-9 years (13%) and 1-4 years (12%).

Where they are teaching:

- 65% in four-year private.
- 33% in four-year public.
- 2% in two-year universities.

Teaching situation:

- Majority (75%) not in union.
- Majority (55%) teach one class per semester.

References

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- Commission on Public Relations Education (2018). *Fast forward: Foundations + future state. Educators + practitioners*. Retrieved from: www.CommissionPRed.org.
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- The PR adjunct life from workplace to academic: Evolving expectations, ideas, and thought starters (2021, March 26). PRSA Educators Academy webinar. Retrieve from: <https://apps.prsa.org/MyPRSAsecurity/Connect?return=https%3a%2f%2fconnect.prsa.org%2fviewdocument%2fthe-pr-adjunct-life-from-workplace%3fCommunityKey%3d2c54e890-4f54-4375-9c53-daf5e1ac20ef%26tab%3dlibrarydocuments>