

A Guide for Students and Early Professionals

Based on the CPRE Seminal Report

Navigating Change:

Recommendations for Advancing Undergraduate Public Relations Education

The 50th Anniversary Report

Commission on Public Relations Education



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This Student Guide is produced by The Weiss Center at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

As loyal graduates of Syracuse University, Jim, Newhouse School '87, and Audra Weiss, Whitman School of Management, '89, are founders of The Weiss Center at the Newhouse School. Since 2012, The Weiss Center works with faculty to prepare SU students for a career in public relations/communications in a social and digital age.

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Background

The Signature Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education (CEPR) issued in November 2023 has great import given the multiple organizational and societal recalibrations underway in the five years since the last study, and with change accelerated by the pandemic: hence the title choice, “Navigating Change.”

As with any large-scale upheaval, the result is that we come out of it changed.

Yet, despite the profound transformations in the work of organizations and public relations, this report reaffirms many of the key abilities expected by practitioners and taught by educators, including the **continued essential value placed on writing, communication, and storytelling.**

But it also lays bare the additional **critical requirement** for professionals, new and experienced, to be able to

- ❑ Take a systemic ethical approach to the profession, and
- ❑ Approach the profession from a broader world view, informed by the seismic changes in technology, society, politics, the economy, and global conflicts.

How To Use This Report

For students and early career professionals navigating one’s career journey begins with working towards being **critical and strategic thinkers, who understand the impact of data—and who have learned the standards for ethical practice,** the need for addressing the issues of DEI, and the role of public relations in contributing to social change and organizational success is critical.

This Student Summary provides guidelines for students and young professionals to adapt to a changing environment and prepare themselves to take the initiative in gaining experience, building a Point-Of-View (POV), expanding their scope of topics, subjects, and skills.

Defining Your Future: Considerations For Advancement in the PR Profession

The Critical Foundation: Write, Write, Write

At the core of a PR professional's career is the ability to communicate, specifically through the written word. Writing is a proxy for thinking. Writing is not perfection. Writing is an ongoing process. You become a better writer by writing often and consistently. Writing defines your perspective, POV, and ability to build relationships and sustain trust.

Gaining Experience and Forming Your POV

Workplace challenges today include work-life balance and hybrid working environments; mental health and accommodations; DEI commitment and assessment; and artificial intelligence (AI). Within this context, also considered were the GenZ expectations of employers, and how employers can adapt for this new group of new hires. For students, it's about seeking out experiential learning classes.

Student Considerations

- As students and early professionals, you should seek to gain actual work experience through internships, campus leadership positions, and volunteer work, and engage in experiential learning opportunities. These opportunities will enhance their exposure to professional behavior and workplace expectations, as well as helping develop key skills such as writing, listening, and critical thinking.
- These experiences should be captured by the student in written form to gain the proper interpretation of situations, management styles, decisions, results.
- A key component of such efforts is to remain curious throughout the experience, asking questions and learning techniques.
- Such experiences help students understand their personal values and priorities and how they should fit into their job search and career plans.
- There is also a strong focus for students communicating on a personal level with key audiences, including effective networking for the short and long term.

❑ Critical Thinking – Addressing the “Why?”

Public relations practitioners have repeatedly ranked critical and strategic thinking as the most sought-after skills for entry-level career success.

Critical thinking starts with the “why?” Understanding the rationale and context surrounding an action, decision, policy, or plan. A key element in critical thinking is

employing the DASA model (Detecting, Analyzing Strategizing, Acting), a critical strategic model as a way of thinking through the traditional research, planning, implementation and evaluation in public relations.

Critical or strategic thinking is a skill learned over the course of one's career. This effort starts in college by thinking about the subject matter and framing the argument in myriad phases in order to discern what you are truly solving for.

One technique to consider is to apply the DASA model or similar framework (below) to their work to continue to develop such a professional benefit.

Student Considerations

- The DASA model includes:
 - Detecting – aware of the environment and circumstance surrounding the subject, decision, issue.
 - Analyzing – asking questions and probing for information while determining your hypothesis or the reason for the situation.
 - Strategizing – identifying the components needed to address or solve the situation.
 - Acting – actions necessary to ensure the strategy or solution is implemented properly.

Critical thinking is what ultimately defines a PR professional. The ability to accurately assess a situation and design a plan to address accordingly.

□ Data Insights and Strategy—Align Data Analysis and AI for Practice

The need for early career public relations practitioners to understand the basics of analytic metrics and data analysis could not be clearer, especially now with the pressing issues of AI. The practice of public relations depends on developing data insights, analyzing their meaning, and communicating them effectively to managers and clients.

While students do not need to become data scientists, they must have a solid grounding in quantitative and qualitative research. Teaching the data analysis process can be approached as an extension of critical thinking. Educators are encouraged to teach students to align measurable organizational outcomes with public relations objectives, prioritize data ethics, and encourage student curiosity.

Student Considerations

- Seek courses that feature data analytics and AI in forming communications strategy, planning, and execution.
- Understand the difference between communications outputs and business outcomes.

- Grasp the elements in quantitative and qualitative research.
- Learn how to read a business balance sheet and comprehend what it conveys about the business.
- Prioritize data ethics, particularly given the growing usage of artificial intelligence in public relations practice.
- Read cases that align data analysis with measurable organizational outcomes and public relations objectives.
- Become comfortable with AI through ChatGBT activities and other platform uses discovering what can be accomplished or avoided.

❑ **Ethics—The Compass that Guides Integrity**

While public relations professionals and educators continue to rank ethics at the top of the list for entry-level practitioners, survey results indicated that our newest professionals are not adequately prepared to address public relations' ethical challenges.

Employers cited the need for students and young professionals to possess essential skills in their first five years, particularly writing, critical thinking, ethics, and analysis. It starts with developing a personal code of ethics.

Student Considerations

- Ensure Ethics is part of your curriculum.
- Review ethics policies of professional organizations – for example, the PRSA, The Arthur W. Page Center, The Plank Center, The Institute for Public Relations, IABC, The Page Society, and The Global Alliance.
- Raise ethical issues or problems with professors and employers.
- Constantly assess personal behavior.
- Research potential employers' "values" and "behaviors" to determine alignment with personal ethics.

❑ **DEI--An Ethical Social Responsibility**

Successful organizational practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion center on appreciating human differences, treating all people fairly, and ensuring that all individuals and communities feel valued, actions that lend themselves well to public relations practice.

DEI skills are valued in the business world and society at large.

Student Considerations

- Understand DEI as an ethical social responsibility that should guide your professional career.
- Pursue a personal definition of DEI.
- View DEI as critical to business success and social efficacy.
- Encourage inclusion, diversity, and equitable treatment everywhere you conduct business.
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☐ PR as a Driver of Social Change—Being Courageous

Public Relations' role as a social and cultural driver is a well stated fact in that the profession generates public engagement and discourse around issues that shape society. Both students and young professionals need to be prepared for the social role of organizations in which they work. Suggestions include a variety of ways that public relations educators can develop the critical thinking of students about social change: engaged scholarship; value-based case studies; classroom activities; guest speakers, and materials such as the Arthur W. Page Center (Insert link) teaching modules.

Student Considerations

- Raise your sensitivity and awareness of social issues facing society and business today.
- Be courageous in addressing challenging issues including gender identity, sexuality, racism, ableism, poverty in your organization and work group.
- Consider how social change can be explored with skills-based and technical content, so that it is genuinely integrated, rather than treated as separate from mainstream practice.
- Practice your own beliefs in the workplace.

One More Thing...

Education is a mutual benefit endeavor - academic leaders, professors, and students joining together to create an environment of exploration, education, sharing, curiosity, research, collaboration, inclusion, diversity, and equality.

Each cohort has a responsibility to connect with the other two forming a bond of learning, confidence, and trust.

It is imperative that students and young professionals are aware of the changes in the profession and the shifts necessary in formal education practice.

And, more importantly, education doesn't stop at the collegiate level. Education is a lifelong process. Embrace it. Enjoy it. Grow with it.

This guide is meant to focus on the essentials of career success.

In the words of Star Trek's Spock, "May You Live Long and Prosper."

About CPRE: *The Commission on Public Relations Education, the authoritative voice on public relations education, was founded in 1973 by the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and the Public Relations Society of America to address the quality of public relations education in the United States.*

Since then, CPRE has issued periodic research reports and recommendations on undergraduate and graduate education in public relations for universities, accrediting bodies, and professional associations around the world. Today, with 24 member organizations in the U.S. and abroad, CPRE operates year-round as a 501(c)3 organization in partnership with the Institute for Public Relations, with support from The PR Council, and continues to offer a forum for public relations education with a global perspective.

Learn more here: <commissionpred.org>

Contact us at commissionpred@gmail.com to learn more about Organizational Memberships, Volunteer opportunities, or participation in the newly created multi-generational Research Panel

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For the full, on-line report including research, findings and a full list of recommendations, go to CPE's website: www.commissionpred.org Additional information is available including all past reports, special topic reports, and "spotlight" reports on fast-changing issues in between the signature reports.

CPRE Organizational Members

- Arthur W. Page Center
- Arthur W. Page Society
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Public Relations Division
- Canadian Public Relations Society
- Chartered Institute of Public Relations
- Conference Board
- European Public Relations Education and Research Association
- Global Alliance for Public Relations and Management
- Institute for Public Relations

- International Association of Business Communicators
- International Communication Association
- International Communications Consultancy Organisation
- Journal of Public Relations Education
- The Museum of Public Relations
- National Black Public Relations Society
- National Communication Association
- Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations
- PR Council
- PRSA College of Fellows
- PRSA Foundation
- Public Relations Society of America
- Public Relations Society of America Educators Academy
- Public Relations Society of America Educational Affairs Committee
- Universal Accreditation Board

About Syracuse University

Syracuse University is a private research university based in Syracuse, N.Y. Established in 1870, the university is comprised of 13 schools and colleges, 200 customizable majors and 100 minors, online degrees and certificates. It also boasts five award winning study abroad centers and international programs in 60 countries.

The S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications is consistently ranked as a top school in public relations, advertising, journalism, communications, media, and interactive degrees.

About The Weiss Center at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University

The Weiss Center was established in 2012 by Syracuse University alumni Jim Weiss '87 and Audra Weiss '89 to provide a pathway for students and professors to comprehend and assimilate the changing world of communications, digital, media, and technology. The Center supports a variety of programs and initiatives each year including workshops, lecture series, internships, in-class modules, industry case studies, curriculum improvements, executives in residence, training, and research. To date, nearly 5,000 students have been impacted by the Center's reach and scope.

The Center's founder, Jim Weiss is the Founder, Chairman of Real Chemistry, the largest and most innovative health care communications consultancy in the world. The global firm employs over 2,000 professionals with revenue of approx. \$550 million annually.
