Ready or Not? Rethinking PR Preparation for a Changing Industry
CPRE Summit

Event Details

Wednesday, October 8, 2025 | 8:30 – 11:00 AM (EDT)

Edelman, 250 Hudson St., New York, NY | Townhall, 14th Floor

Organized and implemented by Hilary Fussell Sisco, Ph.D. APR and Geoff Curtis, Co-Chairs Practitioner/Educator Collaboration Committee

Purpose

The summit aimed to address the preparedness and expectation gaps between new public relations practitioners, educators, and employers. Discussions focused on actionable strategies to better prepare future PR leaders amid rapid industry changes driven by AI, technology, political polarization, and social unrest.
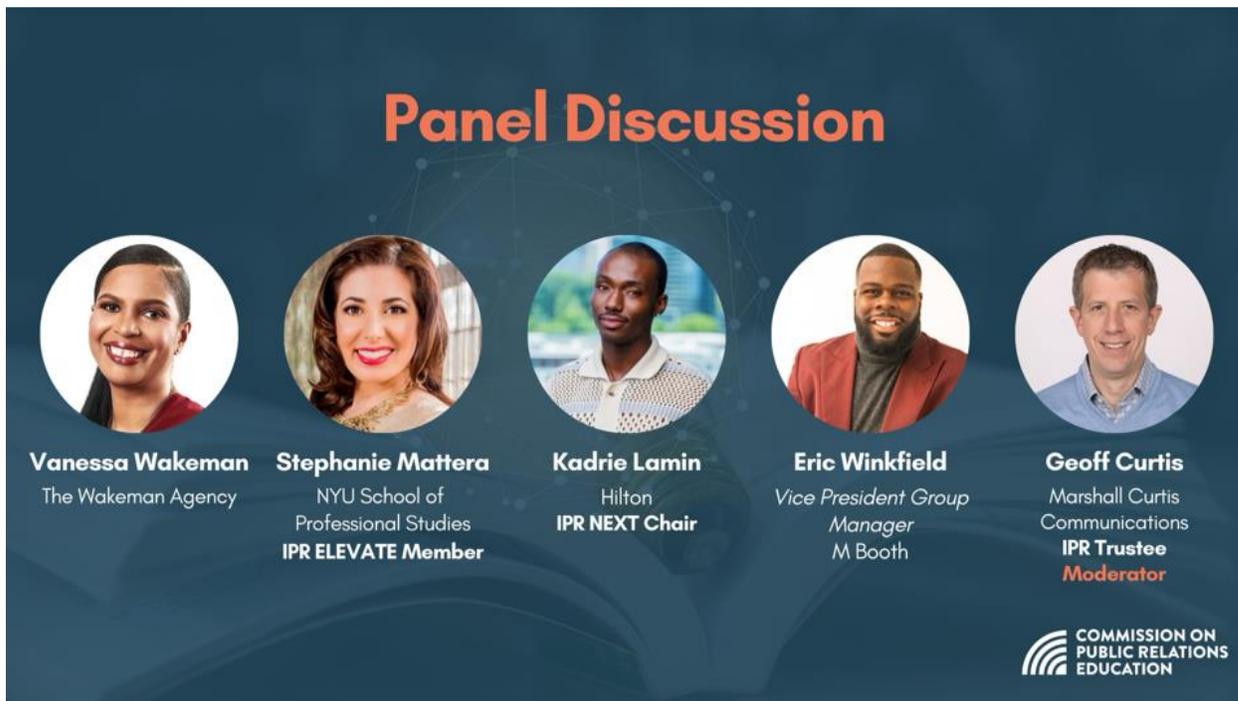
Sponsors

We received generous sponsorship from our partners for this event:

IPR -event materials (signage and name tags) + event planning & management + event staffing
PR Council
CPRE
Edelman-Facility Space

Format

- Breakfast Networking and Panel Before IPR NEXT Event

- Expert panel and breakout sessions featuring senior practitioners and educators

- Facilitated roundtable discussions on bridging academia and industry
  Facilitators:
    Kathie Rennie, NYU School of Professional Studies
    Kim Sample, PR Council
    Julie O'Neil, Texas Christian University, CPRE Co-Chair
    Deborah Silverman, Buffalo State University, CPRE Vice-chair
    Stacey Smith, Jackson, Jackson & Wagner
- Approximately 35-40 attendees

Key Audience

- Public relations educators
- Agency and corporate hiring managers
- Career services professionals
- Practitioners invested in shaping PR talent

Highlights

- Collaborative dialogue on aligning academic preparation with industry expectations
- Exploration of innovative approaches to equip graduates for evolving challenges
- Emphasis on partnership between educators and employers to close skill gaps
- This event provided a rare opportunity to strengthen connections between academia and industry, ensuring the next generation of PR professionals is prepared for a rapidly changing environment.

Key Learnings:

1. Address Media Shifts and Information Literacy

- Teach media literacy and critical thinking: Emphasize the difference between opinion and journalism and help students identify credible sources in a fragmented media landscape.
- Integrate media relations training: Include practical skills like pitching journalists and understanding search technologies (e.g., SEO vs. LLM optimization).
- Explore AI's role in media: Discuss the ethical implications of AI-generated content and deepfakes and encourage students to verify information and understand the PESO model.

2. Build AI Literacy and Equity

- Incorporate AI tools into coursework: Assign tasks where students compare their own writing with AI-generated content (e.g., news releases, survey questions).
- Host guest speakers: Invite professionals to discuss real-world AI applications in PR and industry expectations.
- Promote AI equity: Collaborate with organizations like PRSA to ensure access to AI education across campuses.

3. Reframe Experience for Entry-Level Roles

- Teach students to frame transferable skills: Help them recognize and articulate diverse job roles (e.g. retail or restaurant work) demonstrate valuable PR competencies (e.g., multitasking, customer service).

- Encourage strategic storytelling: Guide students in presenting unpaid or volunteer work as meaningful experience.
- Facilitate resume reviews with professionals: Go beyond career centers to offer targeted feedback from PR practitioners.

4. Cultivate and Evaluate Soft Skills

- Use role-playing and mock interviews: Simulate workplace scenarios to build empathy, collaboration, and problem-solving.
- Encourage initiative and curiosity: Assign projects that require independent thinking and engagement beyond the classroom.
- Highlight current events: Use quizzes and discussions to connect news to PR implications, fostering awareness and adaptability.

5. Develop Self-Awareness and Navigate Organizational Culture

- Teach feedback literacy: Encourage students to seek and reflect on feedback through assignments like campaign reflection papers.
- Expose students to diverse environments: Use interdisciplinary projects and practicum courses to simulate agency, corporate, and nonprofit settings.
- Foster community and mentorship: Promote involvement in PRSSA and IPR Next and help students build networks for support and truth-telling.

Quotable Takeaways:

Media Shifts & Industry Preparedness

- Lines between earned and paid have blurred. What worries me is the lack of critical thinking.

- Ability to curate and communicate into that environment—how to build trust depends on the ecosystem where you hang.

- Newsrooms have shrunk so much… It's almost like sponsored content.

- Stakeholder management has shifted from a relevant message to having to manage competing interests.

AI Literacy & Equity

- AI should be a thought partner—helpful for freeing up time-consuming work, not the driving force.

- AI can't be a substitute for hard work. Students are hesitant to work with peers who are overly reliant on AI.

- Being AI-literate in PR means knowing how to apply AI to your role—not just using it for convenience.

- AI revolution is synonymous with the social media revolution—ethically sound and critical thinking are essential.

Entry-Level Experience & Soft Skills

- It's not a contradiction; it's framing the experience you have.

- Coach entry-level folks to translate what they know into communications.

- Soft skills that matter empathy, ability to read a room, collaboration, and tenacity.

- Students seemed surprised by soft skills, networking and adaptability are just as important as hard skills.

Early-Career Self-Awareness

- Early talent needs to suspend their agenda and ask: What can I contribute to organizational goals?

- Learn how to ask for feedback—and how to receive it.

- Exposing students to friction early helps them learn to operate with complexity.

Hope for the Next Generation

- This generation does not ask for permission. They embrace diversity and bring their unique identities unapologetically.

- Confidence, awareness of the world, and responsibility for it give me hope.