The Essential Components Of An Educational/Professional Development Program In Public Relations

Clare E. Castaldo

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.shu.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
http://scholarship.shu.edu/theses/142
THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AN EDUCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

BY

CLARE E. CASTALDO

Thesis Advisor

Donald N. Lombardi, Ph.D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication
Seton Hall University

2003
ABSTRACT

Public relations is an often-misunderstood discipline. In reality, it is a dynamic field that incorporates skills from a variety of areas. This study provides clarity about common responsibilities for public relations professionals and evaluates how educational and professional development elements help create career opportunities for aspiring public relations practitioners. An overview of the historical background was completed and a qualitative survey of public relations professionals was conducted. Results reveal commonalities with previous research findings explored in the literature review. The ability to write well, the experience of public relations internships and the aggressive pursuit of relevant business courses (e.g., marketing) create favorable conditions for aspiring professionals who desire expeditious job placement after graduation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to recognize a number of people who encouraged and assisted her throughout her time in the master's program. First, thanks to her parents, Henry and Lorraine Goepfert, who taught her the value of education. Secondly, deep appreciation to her husband, Vincent Castaldo, who was ever supportive throughout the author's studies. Finally, endless gratitude to Dr. Donald N. Lombardi -- an advisor, a coach and a friend; Dr. Patricia Kuchon, a great mentor; and Professor Kathleen Donohue Rennie, who provided editing suggestions and guidance throughout the entire thesis development process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I INTRODUCTION

- Research Question 4
- Subsidiary Questions 4
- Purpose of the Study 5
- Definition of Terms 9
- Limitations 10
- Conclusion 11

## II A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A CAREER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Background 12
- The View of Educators 13
- The Perspective of Practitioners 17
- Advice from Educators and Practitioners 18
- Conclusion 22

## III A HISTORICAL AND EDUCATIONAL OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

### I) HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- The Early Years 24
- Public Relations in the 1800s 25
- Public Relations in the Early 20th Century 25
- The Post-War Years 29
- The Modern Era 30

### II) EDUCATIONAL OVERVIEW

- A Chronology of Public Relations Education in American Institutions of Higher Learning 32
- The First Commission on Public Relations Education 33
- The 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education 34
- The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education 35
- Centers of Excellence: Universities Prepare Students for Public Relations Careers 36
- Northwestern University 36
- Syracuse University 38
- Boston University 40
- Conclusion 42
IV A SURVEY SEEKING PROFESSIONAL OPINION
ON THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AN
EDUCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM FOR A CAREER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS 44

Survey Intent 44
Survey Design 44
Survey Distribution and Collection 45
Outcomes 46
Conclusion 61

V SUMMARY 64

Conclusion and Recommendations 64

Bibliography 69

Appendices 74

A - Article 75
B - Survey 77
C - Results of Survey 80
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

“Public relations” is a misnamed occupation. To the outside observer, it means a career in which the primary emphasis is relating to the public. Although the community at large is potentially an important focus, it is not the only one. “Audience” relations would be a more appropriate name, because public relations efforts vary depending on the target group. Indeed, there is variety in the type of audience as well. A public relations professional, at different points in his or her career, may interact on behalf of a client or corporate employer with the media, the government, the general public and/or the internal staff at a company, just to name a few key audiences.

A great deal of mystery also exists about the methods by which public relations people operate. This has been perpetuated by the negative characterization of public relations professionals as “spin doctors” and “flacks”—these are among the more polite monikers used by some. “The propensity in recent years for presumably respected public figures to lie in an attempt to deceive the public has led to the notion that ‘spinning’ the facts is synonymous with public relations practice. It isn’t. Spin – outright lying to hide what really happened – is antithetical to the proper practice of public relations. In public relations, if you lie once, you will never be trusted again – particularly by the media” (Seitel, 2001, p. 5).
Although the methods used by public relations to communicate are often a source of puzzlement to outsiders, they are rather straightforward. In general, the public relations representative is the communicator at large for the client or the corporation for whom he or she works. This means that the individual excels at both verbal and written communication—generating press releases, delivering comment to the media and presenting the company to diverse audiences in the most professional way. In recent decades, however, it has meant much more. Senior public relations people are now in some cases present in the boardroom, sitting next to the CEO, providing guidance on what should be said, and, more importantly, what should be done. Within this framework, the individual who aspires to achieve in the public relations field must not only be able to communicate well, but also has to develop strategic thinking abilities that are of value in the corporate, agency or nonprofit environments.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “public relations specialists held about 137,000 jobs in 2000” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2002). The same source indicates that “although employment is projected to increase much faster than average, keen competition is expected for entry-level jobs.”

Both science and art are involved in the development of a vigorous public relations career. And to the true professional, the understanding and implementation of proper approaches to communications problems in an ethical fashion are the benchmarks of success.

“To be sure, public relations is not yet a profession like law, accounting, or medicine, in which all practitioners are trained, licensed and supervised. Nothing
prevents someone with little or no formal training from hanging out a shingle as a public relations specialist. Such frauds embarrass professionals in the field and, thankfully, are becoming harder and harder to find” (Seitel, 2001, p.8).

Practitioners can distinguish themselves from pretenders in the public relations world through the development of skills, experience and a credible reputation.

As the author prepared to embark upon her own public relations career more than 18 years ago, circumstances were very different than today. She was equipped with the following: a core liberal arts education that included one public relations course, a bachelor of arts degree in communications at a respected university and two internships in public relations. The author also made a point of selecting courses in accounting, economics and journalism to round out her undergraduate years. Upon reflection, however, much of what the author learned about her chosen field has come through work experience and through the guidance and knowledge imparted to her by helpful people in her professional environment.

In the 21st century, the author’s skill base at entry level would not be adequate. Time has become a precious commodity in the business world. Field training is considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Therefore, the more students can do in their undergraduate years to prepare for their career in advance, the better it is for them and their future employers. Any opportunity that allows an entry level individual to receive prior skills and knowledge will create a positive experience by shortening the learning curve for the new public relations employee. This training will also prepare the student to compete in a difficult job market.
Research Question

What is the optimal preparation for a college student who wishes to pursue a career in public relations? This study will examine the essential components of an educational/professional development program in public relations, especially as it pertains to elements necessary for the entry-level employee.

Subsidiary Questions

In order to understand the realm of public relations and the early preparation required to pursue a successful career in the field, an examination of the following issues will be included in this study:

#1. What is the historical background of public relations in the United States?

#2. What is the chronology of American public relations education in institutions of higher learning?

#3. How do leading universities (centers of excellence) prepare a student for a public relations career?

#4. What is the connection between the academic and professional communities in the public relations world?

#5. What technical skills do hiring professionals look for when choosing a new entry-level employee in public relations?

#6. What choices should students make in preparing for a public relations career?

#7. What is the long-term view on the importance of public relations in a business environment?
Purpose of the Study

As mentioned previously, the feverishly competitive job market in public relations requires a college student to strategize well before graduation how he or she will prepare for a public relations career. In the author’s experience during her graduate work as a public relations mentor to undergraduates, it became clear that adequate preparation was a work in progress, and that select students exhibited exceptional skills that would ensure a satisfactory postgraduate position.

There is ongoing debate in both the academic and professional circles about what courses and programs students should embark upon to properly ready themselves for a career in public relations. This study will attempt to isolate a common denominator of skills that will assist the future professional as he or she selects from disciplines that will enhance the prospect of future employment.

Because public relations practitioners do not have to be licensed (yet), there are no official requirements about training in advance of practice. However, resounding indicators show practitioners can enter the discipline without some skills, but will reach early plateaus if they do not improve. In these instances, there is usually agreement about basic components needed to begin a career in public relations.

The preponderance of the Internet, questions about corporate reputation and the lightening speed at which information travels through means beyond the World Wide Web are all compelling current issues for entry-level as well as experienced public relations professionals. Students in today’s college classroom appear to be more adept at handling computer technology than their forebears, but they must also understand how it
fits into the business environment. For example, in previous decades public access to news media reports was limited to morning newspapers and evening broadcast news. Now, the general public, advocacy groups, government and many other constituencies can see the news appear on Internet wire services in real time (e.g., via AOL) – that is, by the minute rather than by the day as was the case in the realms of newspapers and the evening news.

For the public relations practitioner, this development means that quick but thoughtful decision making must be part of their everyday work life. At a junior level in public relations, employees are often at the front lines in monitoring the news. Therefore, they must rapidly develop a keen sense for “feeling out” that which is important to the client or other employer as it comes across the Internet – whether it is a traditional media report, a threatening Web site about the company or even e-mail from unhappy clientele. The issue here is more about the content that the technology presents rather than the technology itself. This topic will be evaluated in the course of the study.

Corporate reputation, long a deliberation limited to those in the public relations trade, has now evolved into a front-page story repeatedly in media outlets throughout the nation. Although it has lead to great financial, emotional and structural damage to many institutions and/or individuals, there is a “silver lining.” The resulting discussion has led business thought leaders to begin to understand what many public relations professionals have known for years: that the visibility of corporate behavior is not a soft subject; rather, it is a critical component of a company’s overall picture.
The importance of relationships and communications with stakeholders has grown as companies' net worth has increasingly come to depend on non-financial assets like corporate reputation, intellectual capital, public trust, employee commitment and brand loyalty. A recent study by the accounting firm, Ernst & Young, found that these intangible assets represent anywhere from 30% to 50% of a company's market value... Ernst & Young concluded: "How skillfully companies manage key non-financial areas of importance and then communicate related successes to outside constituencies -- stakeholders, investors -- will have a powerful effect on how they are valued." (Bergen, 2002)

The opportunity for the entry-level public relations employee is to understand at the very beginning the importance of proper behavior in the company culture as well as in the individual employee – especially in the very visible role as a corporate communicator. It is also a skill to be developed over the course of a public relations career -- to serve as the human “barometer” for the appropriateness of activities in which an organization participates.

Finally, for those technologies beyond the Internet – voice mail, express mail, “snail” mail, faxes, PDAs, cell phones to name a few – each must be thought of as a communication method to be used sensibly by public relations pros. At the entry level in public relations, employees will most often be the tacticians in implementing efforts to reach internal and external audiences through these means. The challenge for the new professional is to understand and respect how these elements should be used (and not
overused) so that communication is received openly and favorably by those whom they wish to reach.

Public relations work is diverse in nature. Some professionals begin their careers by gaining an understanding of the media, which includes offering story ideas (known as "pitching") on behalf of clients, responding to media inquiries, and developing relationships with writers, reporters and television producers. Many employers consider an understanding of media relations a core skill, especially at the junior level. However, a long-term expertise in this area is also known to some as a ticket to job security, since its challenging nature results in a drop off of qualified practitioners over time.

Marketing communications, also known as product public relations, is another important aspect of public relations work. On the corporate side, professionals will often outsource this function to public relations firms. For instance, to introduce a new product, a corporate communicator will likely work with an internal marketing professional to set the public relations objectives (and frequently strategy) and approach several public relations firms to develop suggested tactics, for example. The agencies will then compete to determine who is ultimately awarded the project. On the corporate side, the "judging" communicator must be experienced enough to select the firm that will do the best work. This function is typically given to those at a middle management level and above. On the agency side, the senior level practitioners are on the "front line" in bidding for the business, while the junior level staff will do the "leg work" (e.g., gathering relevant information) to prepare the proposal for the prospective client. In
smaller agencies, the tasks are not as segmented — both junior and senior staff will wear many "hats" in preparing for a new business pitch.

Internal, or employee communications, is a function that resides primarily in larger organizations, particularly corporations. In this role, the public relations professional is responsible for serving as the bridge between senior management and the employee population. The communicator will often be responsible for publishing, editing and sometimes writing the employee newsletter; handling executive communications — including speechwriting and presentation development; and providing strategic guidance to senior executives about key communication opportunities within the organization. Although not as visible as media relations or product communications, this aspect of public relations is often under served and less respected, but nonetheless critical. Companies that do well financially are likely those who keep their employees informed and understand the importance of ongoing internal communication during good and difficult times.

Other important areas of public relations work include: community relations, financial relations and special events, to name a few (Public Relations Society of America, 2002).

This study will evaluate how educational and professional development elements help create opportunities to work successfully in these areas.

**Definition of Terms**

AOL – America Online, a leading Internet service provider.
CEO – chief executive officer.

E-mail - electronic mail.

“Flack” – [a negative term used by some to describe] one who provides publicity (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Internet - an electronic communications network that connects computer networks and organizational computer facilities around the world (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

PDA – Personal Digital Assistant.

Practicum - a course of study designed especially for the preparation of teachers and clinicians that involves the supervised practical application of previously studied theory (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

“Spin Doctor” - a person (as a political aide) responsible for ensuring that others interpret an event from a particular point of view (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

“Snail”mail – slang for regular U.S. mail.

Web site – the location of an organization’s information on the World Wide Web.

World Wide Web - a part of the Internet designed to allow easier navigation of the network through the use of graphical user interfaces and hypertext links between different addresses – called also Web (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Limitations

This study will not focus on the less technical aspects of professional development in public relations. For instance, skills such as flexibility and related personality characteristics are highly subjective aspects of training and development that
are not included in typical curricula in which a student might enroll during undergraduate years. An examination of the technical skills is more appropriate to a study such as this, in which there is discussion of college coursework to prepare the student for the career.

In addition, a full curriculum will not be developed in connection with this study. There exists literature in which a litany of suggested courses for the public relations student is highlighted. This is primarily an evaluation of the most important skills needed for the entry-level public relations employee, and how higher education can potentially meet those needs through their respective programs.

Finally, this study will emphasize corporate and agency experience in examining the field of public relations, since the author's background and field of reference is associated with the for-profit world.

Conclusion

Public relations, long a misunderstood field, is gaining in importance in American business. Honesty and integrity are integral to communicating effectively, both inside and outside the organization. Prominent public relations practitioners guide what is said and what is done by companies, and ensure that activities are transparent to stakeholders. Upcoming chapters will explore the past, present and future of education in preparing students to enter the field.
Chapter II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A CAREER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Background

Although there is some communal opinion, divergent views do exist in different sectors about what constitutes adequate preparation for a career in public relations. It is therefore worthwhile to explore what the literature reveals from the perspective of leading educators and practitioners in the field.

A unique aspect of public relations is the convergence of education and practice – some professors participate in both functions, while others were full-time public relations professionals before pursuing a career in academia. As a result, as highlighted in one study, “educators and practitioners are in agreement as to the essential skills, knowledge and concepts that should be and are being taught in public relations programs” (Stacks, et al., 1999, p. 27).

Surveys and analyses explored in the coming pages provide insight on the public relations field and how factors influencing the profession have changed the demands on entry-level qualifications, or how those demands have remained consistent.

According to Seitel (2001), in 1975 a public relations foundation attempted to pinpoint a universal definition for public relations from an analysis of 472 different definitions. The foundation’s project offers perspective on how fragmented professionals are about their own identity. This diversity of thought translates into how to properly prepare for a job in the field. However, in sifting through the literature, one
can see patterns and common themes that help to provide some direction. Those connections are examined in this chapter.

The View of Educators

"The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education was comprised of 47 educators and practitioners" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 11). The landmark report is housed on the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) Public Relations Division Web site, among others. For the purpose of this study, most references to work of the Commission will appear in the paper's "View of Educators" section, as a majority of commission members have academic affiliations.

According to the 1999 Commission, the prepared student is:

- Grounded in liberal arts and sciences. Well prepared in public relations theory and practice. Tested not only in the classroom but in the field. Understanding the inherent connection between public relations and management, sociology and the many other pillars of modern society. But also with the necessary skills – writing, analyzing, thinking – sharpened and ready for use (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p.2).

Public relations education should be broad in its scope, but also there are specific disciplines that are interconnected and important to highlight in planning for a public relations career.
Public relations competency clearly goes beyond one skill – writing – and broadens the necessary education to other liberal arts disciplines. "The Commission strongly encourages a minor or double major in the liberal arts, social sciences or business" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 4). The committee's recommendations represent a varied curriculum from which the public relations student can choose.

The author, as an undergraduate, emphatically presented a case for the integration of business courses in the liberal arts curriculum through the availability of a business minor (See Appendix A). In an op-ed University newspaper article that appeared prior to graduation, she wrote of her frustration in observing business students getting interviews and lucrative jobs much more often (and more quickly) than liberal arts majors. She proposed that the school adopt a curriculum in which the solid wall between the liberal arts and business schools would be destroyed. Ultimately, in the following years it was—and liberal arts students can now indeed minor in business.

Dean Kruckeberg, Professor, Communication Studies, University of Northern Iowa (UNI), prominent public relations educator and co-chair of the 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education noted that:

Students need to be educated in the social sciences because they will serve as cultural interpreters and need to be skilled in conflict resolution. It is also important to be educated in a variety of business disciplines, including business administration, finance, economics and marketing (PR News, 2001).
Maria Russell, professor and chair, public relations department, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University, another public relations educator who also sat on the 1999 Commission, agrees with the business aspect of Kruckeberg’s comment.

The curriculum has changed dramatically. Because public relations is a management function, there is increasing emphasis on strategic planning, critical thinking and problem-solving through communications (PR News, 2001).

Finally, Bill Adams, associate professor of public relations and advertising, Florida International University provides his perspective on academic choices for the aspiring public relations practitioner:

We breed professionals for tomorrow. I tell kids they have to be eclectic. They must read everything they can get their hands on and cannot take just public relations courses. They understand that public relations is not just about clips [stories placed in print publications], that this is a strategic process that incorporates marketing, advertising and technology (PR News, 2001).

“Workinpr.com recently interviewed several PR professors from universities across the nation. The overwhelming consensus [from the project] is that writing is the number one skill integral to a PR education [author’s emphasis]” (PR News, 2001).

A workinpr.com Web page entitled “View from the Profs: State of Undergrad PR Programs” includes a question directed to academics: What skills do you feel are integral to a PR education? Maria Russell from Syracuse offers the following:
Writing, writing, writing. That will always be the number one skill – and of course there are several types of writing that students must learn (including news writing, public relations writing, business writing, writing for electronic media and the web), followed by visual communications. But, in addition, our students develop skills in public relations and PR research; strategic planning (campaigns); and critical thinking (Workinpr.com, 2002).

Clark Caywood, director of the corporate public relations graduate program with Northwestern’s Medill School of Journalism, shares his own perspective with writer John Frank on what students need, and what they are lacking now:

PR education is deficient in one important area: encouraging and requiring PR students to study more about the business world. He argues that even undergraduate PR students should be taking marketing, accounting and finance courses to better understand how their eventual client or employers run their businesses. “Traditionally trained PR students don’t get enough background in business. The tradition is for communication students not to take those types of courses; journalism schools don’t encourage students to take them” (Frank, 2002). Finally, in a striking example of the importance of a broad-based background, extending beyond traditional liberal arts and sciences courses, writer Matthew Arnold provides an important lesson:

Professor James O’Rourke (Fanning Center for Business Communication at Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business) tells the tale of a well-known IR [Investor Relations] professional for a powerful Chicago bank who saw his hard-fought
ascendancy up to corporate ladder grind to a halt because he couldn't read a
balance sheet. Says O'Rourke, "...at that level, knowing how journalism works is
useless." Knowing the business inside-out is essential to advancement at the
upper rungs (Arnold, 2002).

The Perspective of Practitioners

Stacks, Botan, et al., (1999) surveyed 258 public relations educators and practi-
tioners on a variety of issues related to public relations education; 42% of respondents
were professionals. The researchers found that...

(For entry-level outcomes), top-ranked hiring skills included writing skills, ability
to communicate publicly, interpersonal skills, and practical experience.
The top-ranked hiring problems were writing skills and understanding of business
practices (p.17).

Neff, Walker, et al., (1999) found similar results when analyzing data from the
national survey conducted for the 1998 National Communication Association Summer
Conference, as well as findings developed by an Outcomes Task Team.

(For entry-level practitioner outcomes), major hiring problems included critical
thinking and problem-solving, writing skills, understanding business practices,
practical experience, and basic knowledge of the mass media. Significantly, the
two top hiring requirements, critical thinking and writing skills, were also the
most frequently cited hiring problems. Thus, while practitioners and educators agree about what entry-level employees should know and do, graduates do not seem to meet these standards regularly (p. 35).

In a practitioner survey conducted by PR Central, an online news publication, respondents were quick to identify some of the specific shortcomings of public relations students, with the biggest complaints falling into three broad categories: poor writing skills; lack of business acumen or understanding; and lack of critical or strategic thinking skills (Council of Public Relations Firms, 2002).

A former public relations professional, Cynthia Clark, who now teaches at Boston University explains her philosophy about training students for a career in public relations:

"You can’t even be a plain-vanilla PR person without understanding the very nature of a corporation, which is profit. You cannot communicate in a vacuum.”

Clark thinks too many PR programs are concerned with imparting skills, and not with functioning in an organization and learning what it does. “To craft a solid message that makes sense, you must understand so much history of the company, the CEO’s predilections, and the relations the company has had in the past with investors and customers and employees”(Weidlich, 2002).

Advice from Educators and Practitioners

As noted, there are many opinions about what entry-level public relations professionals lack and what they need to succeed in their careers. At this point, it is
helpful to refer to a citation in the Stacks, Botan, et al. (1999) survey in Public Relations Review about the purpose of a public relations education:

Respondents were also asked what they believed the purpose of an undergraduate major and minor[sic]... The major was seen as preparing the student for an entry-level job in the field; the minor laid a foundation within other majors for adding public relations skills (p.23).

Another helpful resource comes from the Public Relations Society of America, which provides student guidelines on a section of its Web site entitled “Careers in Public Relations.”

In addition to coursework, the importance of gaining in-school experience, through bona fide public relations internships or practicums[sic] is stressed. The most frequently recommended secondary or ‘minor’ area of study for public relations students is business (Public Relations Society of America, 2002).

Writer Allison May, in a column on the Workinpr.com Web site, agrees with the PRSA guidance:

If you are a current student, a critical component to being considered for employment by a corporation or agency is to have some type of PR-related experience on your resume by the time you graduate college. Internships are an excellent way to achieve this (Workinpr.com, 2002).

In the same column, May encourages students to work for the school newspaper, provide public relations volunteer work for a nonprofit group, and consider that
employers want new hires to be knowledgeable about the industry in which they seek to
work (Workinpr.com, 2002).

Finally, the Public Relations Society of America contributes the following in a
discussion of preparing for the profession:

The public relations practitioner is a “counselor” whose advice and services are
often sought when an organization faces the prospect of trouble. Therefore, it is
important to develop the capacity to think analytically under pressure, to draw out
the necessary information, and to express persuasive practical solutions (Public
Relations Society of America, 2002).

A core liberal arts education, with courses in writing, communications and public
relations, among other disciplines, provide a suitable primer for the potential
professional. As a practitioner, one must be able to write well, as noted previously.
Many organizations now use a writing test as a screening mechanism to determine a
candidate’s suitability to work in a public relations position for both entry-level and more
senior roles. If one cannot write well, he or she may be initially pigeonholed into a
support function (if they are even offered the position) and may perhaps reach an early
dead end in the public relations career.

Therefore, the ability to write well likely will open doors for job prospects.
However, over a period of time, if an individual wishes to advance, he or she must have a
grasp of the “big picture” view of the organization. This is where business skills play a
role. Understanding marketing helps because it is that function that often provides
funding for public relations activities in organizations. Indeed, at some corporations, the
public relations department reports to the head of marketing. In addition, a basic grasp of accounting and finance is important because at some point a public relations professional must manage a budget. Those who cannot do this well in an agency risk losing the account, and in a corporation the liability may affect the bottom line, depending on the size of the company. It may also affect the credibility of the public relations professional, because he or she must earn the trust of others in the organization — some of whom are MBAs who expect their public relations counterparts to at least speak their language.

Also, the practical experience obtained through a public relations internship is indispensable. Because of the keen competition for entry-level jobs, employers have come to expect desirable candidates to have a resume with at least one, if not several, public relations work experiences. Without this background, graduates can expect a tough road to opening doors for desirable public relations positions.

In an internship, one will begin to observe the importance of critical thinking in the profession. Real-life decisions must be made in a short time span, and information must be gathered, sifted and discussed to determine a course of action. Academic coursework that requires this type of mental training is beneficial; however, employers will ultimately cherish those graduates who have further developed analytical skills in a workplace environment. The advantage of participating in problem-solving in the work environment are these: one cannot determine the outcome in advance; and issues that arise are not neatly packaged and woven together as they may be in a text. Without the ability to think critically, entry-level (and more senior) employees will be left out of
decision-making circles and left to the routine task of implementing that which has already been resolved.

Conclusion

Although there may be many ways to define the public relations occupation, undeniable truths exist about what the literature indicates students need to be prepared for a career in the profession.

Writing in many forms is the skill that educators and practitioners agree must be mastered in order for an entry-level employee to perform adequately in public relations. This is the "door opener" for many to begin their careers in the field. However, beyond writing, other elements are necessary in a public relations skill set as well, particularly if the employee wishes to advance.

Business knowledge, as in understanding elementary concepts about the way organizations function, a basic grasp of financial concepts such as accounting and finance, and a big-picture perspective about where a company or client fits into industry and society as a whole are important skills. Specifically, the individual would benefit from introductory courses in accounting and finance. Also, as one professor indicated in the literature review, a course in business administration would be beneficial as well. Another useful course would be organizational behavior -- because a corporate public relations practitioner, perhaps as much as senior management, will find him or herself interacting with almost all divisions within the company at one time or another.
Finally, both academics and practitioners stress the importance of students seeking and receiving real-life experience through internships obtained before graduation. Since public relations is a highly experiential discipline, learning the tactics in a real-time environment are essential for the new practitioner.
Chapter III

A HISTORICAL AND EDUCATIONAL OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

I) HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

“Public relations has evolved into an important business field that [helps] organizations communicate and build relationships with their publics and those who influence those publics” (Bergen, 2002). How did this discipline evolve into such a prominent role in American society? A historical review provides clues.

The Early Years

“The American public relations experience dates back to the founding of the Republic” (Seitel, 2001, p. 26). A profound example of this is a Thomas Paine essay, encouraging colonists to band together (Seitel, 2001):

“These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country.” The people listened, were persuaded and took action – testifying to the power of early American communicators (Seitel, 2001, p.27).

The Federalist, letters written to leading newspapers by political leaders such as Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, encouraged ratification of the United States Constitution (Cutlip, et al., 1994). Grass roots campaigns in the 21st century still use the public relations technique of letters to the editor to encourage support or dissent on issues of the day.
Public Relations in the 1800s

In the century following, "among the more prominent, yet negative, antecedents of modern day public relations that took hold in the 1800s was press agentry... In 1829, President Andrew Jackson selected (Amos) Kendall, a writer and editor living in Kentucky, to serve in his administration. He wrote speeches, state papers, and messages and turned out press releases" (Seitel, 2001, p. 27).

Among Kendall's most successful ventures in [sic] Jackson's behalf was the development of the administration's own newspaper, the Globe... Kendall would pen a Jackson news release, distribute it for publication to a local newspaper, and then reprint the press clipping in the Globe to underscore Jackson's nationwide popularity. Indeed, that popularity continued unabated throughout Jackson's years in office, with much of the credit going to the president's public relations advisor (Seitel, 2001, p. 28).

Phineas T. Barnum was also an early pioneer of press agentry and preceded a number of theatrical press agents that served show business (Cutlip, et al., 1994).

...Barnum was a master publicist. In the 1800s, as owner of a major circus, Barnum generated article after article for his traveling show... Barnum also staged bizarre events...to drum up free newspaper exposure (Seitel, 2001, p. 29).

Public Relations in the Early 20th Century

"The nation's first public relations firm, the Publicity Bureau, was founded in Boston in 1900..." (Seitel, 2001, p. 32). Their mission was "to do a general press agent
business for as many clients as possible for as good pay as the traffic would bear” (Cutlip, et al., 1994, p. 101). Harvard University was a client of the Publicity Bureau beginning in 1900 (Newsom, et al., 2000).

Over the years, the creation of many public relations firms followed, including major companies such as Hill & Knowlton, Burson-Marsteller and Edelman, ultimately employing thousands of public relations professionals in sites throughout the world (Seitel, 2001). The scope of these firms’ work now goes far beyond publicity, and gives public relations its broad definition today.

Also in the beginning of the 20th century, the “robber barons” – “railroad owners such as William Vanderbilt...and oil magnates such as John D. Rockefeller ruled the fortunes of thousands of others” (Seitel, 2001, p. 29). “The public be damned” was a famous remark attributed to Vanderbilt (Seitel, 2001).

It was in this environment that a feisty group of journalists - known as the “muckrakers” emerged, exposing questionable business and government behavior (Newsom, et al., 2000). The resulting climate included government passing laws on company conduct, trust-busting and the emergence of newly organized labor unions (Seitel, 2001).

Business leaders tried to ward off criticism and attacks through lawyers and advertising placement (Cutlip, et al., 1994). “The best way to influence public opinion, as it turned out, was through honesty and candor. This simple truth was the key to the accomplishments of American history’s first successful public relations counselor, Ivy Lee” (Seitel, 2001, p. 30).
“Ivy Ledbetter Lee was a former Wall Street reporter who plunged into publicity work in 1903... Lee firmly believed that the only way business could answer its critics convincingly was to present its side honestly, accurately, and forcefully” (Seitel, 2001 p. 30).

In 1914, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who headed one of the most maligned and misunderstood of America’s wealthy families, hired Lee... When the family was censured scathingly for its role in breaking up a strike at the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, the family hired a labor relations expert (at Lee’s recommendation) to determine the causes of an incident that led to several deaths. The result of this effort was the formation of a joint labor management board to mediate all workers’ grievances on wages, hours, and working conditions. Years later, Rockefeller admitted that the public relations outcome of the Colorado strike “was one of the most important things that ever happened to the Rockefeller family” (Seitel, 2001, p. 31).

Lee was later named “Poison Ivy” by members of Congress investigating un-American activities for his consulting role for the German Dye Trust parent company, ultimately known as an agent for the policies of Adolph Hitler (Seitel, 2001). “When Lee realized the nature of Hitler’s intentions, he advised the Dye Trust cartel to work to alter Hitler’s ill-conceived policies of restricting religious and press freedom” (Seitel, 2001, p. 31).

“Despite his unfortunate involvement with the Dye Trust, Ivy Lee is recognized as the individual who brought honesty and candor to public relations. Lee, more than
anyone before him, transformed the field from a questionable pursuit (i.e., seeking positive publicity at any cost) into a professional discipline designed to win public confidence and trust through communications based on openness and truth" (Seitel, 2001, p. 31).

Although Seitel (2001) refers to Ivy Lee as the “real father of modern public relations,” others give that title to another individual. Edward L. Bernays, who began as a publicist in 1913, was “a giant in the public relations field for nearly the entire century...Bernays was a true public relations scholar” (Seitel, 2001 p.34). In 1923, Bernays was the first public relations course instructor and authored the publication *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, the first public relations book (Cutlip, et al., 1994).

During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson created a committee under George Creel, a former journalist, who, with other notables, mobilized wartime promotion and helped fund the war through Liberty Loan publicity drives (Newsom, et al., 2000).

“Arthur W. Page [a name known to many in the public relations business today], became AT&T’s first public relations vice president in 1927. Page was a pacesetter, helping to maintain AT&T’s reputation as a prudent and proper corporate citizen” (Seitel, 2001, p. 33).

In the midst of World War II, the Office of War Information (OWI) was established; it ultimately set the stage for the U.S. Information Agency and was the starting point for training public relations professionals as well as developing tactical approaches (Cutlip, et al., 1994).
The Post-War Years

After the Second World War, the explosive demand for goods and services paralleled the rise of public relations in the form of publicity support (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999). Since public relations was not yet widely studied in formal academic environments, industry reached out to journalists to do the work (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999).

"These professionals turned their skills toward a kind of 'in-house journalism' for corporations or toward roles as publicists and promoters for clients. By 1950, an estimated 17,000 men and 2,000 women were employed in these endeavors” (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 9).

Responding to the needs of their employers and clients, public relations practitioners began to expand their activity into such areas as financial relations (annual reports, shareholder meetings and presentations to the financial community) and internal communications (publications, special events and award programs) to support efforts to enhance employee productivity and commitment (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 9).

The flush economic environment in this era provided other arenas in which public relations could expand in the corporate world (Newsom, et al., 2000).

The affluence of the 1950s encouraged businesses to find new uses for their money, and one job of public relations was to help them reinvest it in society - not only in tax-sheltering foundations, but also in health and community interest campaigns, public service drives and educational seminars. By encouraging
corporate investment in society, PR gained greater respect and increased its own influence within corporations (Newsom, et al., 2000, p. 49).

Another dynamic social force in the history of communication emerged during this time: the arrival of television in American homes (Cutlip, et al., 1994).

The advent of television as a powerful national forum and its consequent widespread impact on a more-educated society likewise brought new public relations opportunities and problems to institutions and their executives. Television's role in politics, for example, spawned the political campaign specialist, now a major role in the nation's political system. Eventually, television prompted many leaders in business, government, military, and so forth to undergo "media training" to become adept at talking in "sound bites," controlling the agenda in interviews, and fielding questions with answers based on a message strategy (Cutlip, et al., 1994, pp. 120-121).

The Modern Era

In the tumult of the 1960s, social issues and problems forced public relations communication in places like government and business to evolve from one-way message delivery to two-way dialogue involving listening to audiences; assessing their needs, expectations and demands, settling conflicts between groups, and influencing public opinion and behavior (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999).

In recent years, public relations professionals have moved toward an emphasis on building and maintaining relationships and on becoming skilled, active counselors
at management's decision making table. Driving this latest evolutionary
movement are influential societal trends: global business operations…the
empowerment of public opinion within the global village; segmented, fragmented
audiences; the information explosion that has led to uncontrolled, gateless
dissemination of messages…[and] increasing government regulation and

Technology advances, previously unimaginable, have created a revolution in
communication in recent years.

In the 21st century, true two-way communications has arrived. Not only have
cable, satellite, mobile phones, pagers, faxes, bar code scanners, voice mail
systems, videodisk technologies, and all the rest revolutionized the information
transmission and receiving process, but the emergence of the Internet and the
World Wide Web have radically intensified the spread of communications even
further… The impact of the Web on public relations practice has been
phenomenal. E-mail dominates internal communications. Journalists now regard
the Internet as their number two choice of organizational contact - just behind a
human source. A new generation of Americans has been weaned and depends on
the Internet as its primary source of communication (Seitel, 2001, p.37).

Newsom, et al., (2000) cites other developments brought forth by the Internet:
The media's use of their own Web pages to release stories that may be speculative
has created new difficulties for public relations people. Individuals can also use
the Web to circulate rumors that often have serious consequences. With their lack
of editors, chat rooms and independent Web pages can pose problems even more
troublesome than stories released by major media organizations. And while the
Web has become a preferred fact finding tool because of its easy access, the
verifiability of Web information remains a problem... [Conversely, however, new
technologies have resulted in many positive developments.] Desktop publishing
improved the look of in-house publications and made possible sophisticated

As identified in the aforementioned review, public relations has taken on many
forms since its beginnings in the early history of the United States. However, as time
has elapsed, each new decade has brought with it changes in culture that have had a
profound effect upon the priorities of the professional communicator. In any case, it is
clear that the occupation has expanded in breadth and depth and continues to gain in
stature as an important part of society.

II) EDUCATIONAL OVERVIEW

A Chronology of Public Relations Education in
American Institutions of Higher Learning

As mentioned previously by Cutlip (1994) Edward L. Bernays taught the first
course in public relations in 1923. Another important figure in the history of public
relations education is Ray Simon, professor emeritus at Utica College in upstate New
York (Frank, 2002). "In 1949, Utica asked [Simon] to create the school’s PR program.
His first public relations requirements included an ‘introductory’ course and a ‘writing’
course, Simon recalls. Public relations students were also required to take a ‘journalism editing’ course’ (Frank, 2002, p. 7).

Recognizing a lively and promising career market for their students, colleges and universities began to offer formal education for public relations. In the early 1950s, about a dozen schools offered public relations programs. In 1969 the Public Relations Society of America began to charter student chapters at colleges and universities; initially there were 14, all agreeing to offer at least two courses in public relations (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 10).

“By the 1970s, courses that reviewed public relations case studies were common, a step [Professor Ray] Simon says provided a major boost to student understanding of public relations. ‘The big change was in the case courses. Cases require students to come to grips with what is really out there,’ he says” (Frank, 2002, p. 7).

The First Commission on Public Relations Education

In 1975, the Public Relations Society of America created the first Commission on Public Relations Education, comprised of eight educators and practitioners, formed to create public relations education guidelines (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999). “One of the Commission’s primary recommendations was that programs offer...four courses in public relations at the undergraduate level. Thus, four courses became the new requirement for chartering chapters of the burgeoning Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)” (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p.10).
The public relations core courses in the 1975 curriculum recommendations included: Introduction to public relations, Publicity media and campaigns, Public relations case problems, and Internship (Fisher, 2000). "The public relations program should include the arts, and humanities, with special emphasis in communication and public relations" (Fisher, 2000, paragraph 5).

According to one author, "the commission looked at the state of undergraduate ... education in U.S. schools and confronted the criticism that continues to this day: college graduates can't write" (Fischer, 2000, paragraph 4).

The 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education

The 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education deliberated three years before issuing updated guidelines... One of the primary recommendations of this 1987 Commission was... five courses in formal public relations study for undergraduates. This also became the requirement for PRSSA chapters [guidelines] (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 10). "They also recommended that public relations students minor in business" (Fisher, 2000, paragraph 12).

"Like the earlier study it reaffirmed the value of a well-rounded program of the arts, sciences and humanities. They reported that the most valued courses among practitioners and educators were courses in English and an internship. The internship will show up again in later studies as particularly valued by the profession" (Fisher, 2000, paragraph 8).
The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education

As noted earlier, "The 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education was comprised of 47 educators and practitioners" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999, p. 11).

Public relations courses would comprise 25 to 40% of all undergraduate credit hours. Five should clearly be identified with public relations in the title. Five courses are considered a minimum. The remaining 60 to 75% would come from the liberal arts, social sciences, business and language. The commission recommended a "minor or double major in another discipline. Especially suggested are business and the behavioral sciences" (Fisher, 2000, paragraph 25).

"The Commission ...[also] recommended... nontraditional but pivotal areas of study such as relationship building, societal trends, and multicultural and global issues" (Seitel, 2001, p. 38).

As indicated in this review of education, public relations academic study has evolved, not unlike the discipline itself. It clearly has roots in a journalistic tradition, whether training an individual for the publicist role of interacting with reporters on behalf of clients or the training the future corporate staff writer in the mid-20th century.

However, education then moved toward an emphasis of understanding the history of public relations in business -- through case studies -- as well as a grasp of public relations theory, which had earlier support in academia. Internships became part of the recommended curriculum repertoire more than 25 years ago, which some may view as a surprise.
Finally, as long as 15 years ago thought leaders began to see the value of business courses in addition to the tradition public relations curriculum. As noted, more recently, they have added on top of these other areas emphasis on behavioral sciences, global studies and societal trends.

The implications for the evolution of public relations education are that it is no longer just a “tactical” program designed to prepare the student for a very narrow role as a publicist or writer within a corporation. Today’s academic structure reflects the need to develop well-rounded individuals who are grounded in public relations studies, liberal arts and business/managerial disciplines to prepare the public relations practitioner for a much broader and more influential role within an organization.

Centers of Excellence: Universities Prepare Students for Public Relations Careers

A survey conducted by Inside PR asked public relations practitioners to rate schools that are turning out well-prepared students; Northwestern was the top choice, followed by Syracuse and Boston University, respectively (Council of PR Firms, 2002).

Northwestern University

A review of the Northwestern Web site surprisingly indicates that there is no program or concentration in public relations on the undergraduate level. However, Northwestern does have a highly regarded undergraduate journalism program at the Medill School. It is worth noting that Northwestern is ranked number 10 among national universities-doctoral in the 2003 U.S. News & World Report guide; its freshman
admissions are "most selective;" and journalism is the third most popular major (America's Best Colleges).

Within the Web description of the undergraduate program, the lead sentence notes the following: "Whether you want a career in newspapers, magazines, broadcast journalism, public relations [author's emphasis], new media or other fields that require good writing, Medill will prepare you" (Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, 2002). The same Web page goes on to provide an overview of the curriculum, including "...a wide variety of courses in the social and natural sciences, liberal arts and humanities...coupled with hands-on journalism training, including an academic internship in the mass media" (Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, 2002).

A cursory review of the required courses in the Medill journalism program indicate that they are purely media-focused, with the exception of electives in advertising and direct marketing available to students in their senior year (Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, 2002).

Northwestern also offers programs in the Department of Communication Studies. However, the course listings indicate a heavy emphasis on rhetoric, interpersonal communication and organizational communication (Northwestern University, Department of Communication Studies, 2002). Once again, there is no indication that a course in public relations exists.
Students have graduate level opportunities at Northwestern, within Integrated Marketing Communications, to take courses in public relations. As noted "this program not only teaches students how to communicate but how to manage the process and how to integrate it with other disciplines within the organization" (Integrated Marketing Communications, A Medill Graduate Program, Northwestern University, 2002).

Syracuse University

Syracuse University offers a very intensive program for its undergraduate public relations majors. According to its catalog, accessed through the Web site, students must take a total of 36 credits in the major. Theory, two writing courses, and graphic arts studies are required before junior year. In junior year, students take public relations research, a campaign course and a critical perspectives course. In their final year, students enroll in communications law, public relations management, a practicum or a selected topic or international public relations course (London program), as well as a production elective outside the major (Syracuse University, 2002).

In the question and answer section about the public relations major on the Syracuse Web site, the university outlines its intention for students:

We prepare the practitioners of tomorrow to manage…relationships. Students learn how to use information to direct and evaluate communication with many types of groups…Our students learn how to counsel the management of their organizations in matters of public opinion and social responsibility. We equip our students with the technical skills expected of entry level professionals as well as
the management skills they will need to advance. We teach our students to craft messages and communication strategies that are mutually beneficial to their organizations and those they deal with every day (Public Relations, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, 2002).

Syracuse also notes that "its undergraduate program has consistently been ranked among the top three programs in the nation..." In the 2003 U.S. News & World Report guide, Syracuse is ranked in the second tier among national universities – doctoral; its freshman admissions are more selective; and communications is its most popular major (America's Best Colleges).

Syracuse points out that its internship is among the oldest and most established in the nation, its PRSSA chapter among the first to be chartered nationally and that its undergraduate program is a model for all other accredited public relations programs in the nation. (Public Relations, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, 2002).

In further highlighting courses, the Web site indicates that real-life activities are part of the undergraduate curriculum – such as news conferences and on-camera interviews. It also notes that students conduct social science research applying both qualitative and quantitative methods, and provide public relations client service to local nonprofits such as the United Way and the American Cancer Society. (Public Relations, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, 2002).
Finally, in the Web site section discussing the public relations program requirements, the philosophy of the coursework is emphasized: “We teach public relations as a communication science, a communication art and a management function.”

The science aspect is attributed to courses in theory, research and analysis, among others; the art is connected to the writing, visual aspect and special events work, for example; the management is linked to strategic planning, solving problems and thinking critically, as well as law and people/money management (Undergraduate Programs, Public Relations, Syracuse University, 2002).

It should also be noted that Syracuse University also has a reputable journalism program (graduate and undergraduate) as well as a master’s program in public relations, all within the Newhouse School of Public Communications. However, a review of the undergraduate newspaper journalism Web page indicates that its program is geared explicitly for those who wish to pursue a print media career (Undergraduate Programs, Journalism, Syracuse University, 2002). This is a strong contrast to the Northwestern journalism program, which brands itself as useful for those interested in public relations careers.

Boston University

Boston University, through its Web site, indicates that students interested in a public relations career can receive a Bachelor of Science degree in communication, and choose a concentration in public relations (College of Communication @BU, Boston
University, 2002). The 2003 U.S. News & World Report guide ranks the school in the second tier for national universities—doctoral; its freshman admissions are more selective; and communications technologies is listed as the most popular major (America's Best Colleges).

In touting its distinctiveness, a professor in the public relations program notes the following: “The main aspect that separates BU from other schools is the dual emphasis on theory as well as practice. We have many theorists, well-known Ph.D.s, but we also have many professionals...in their field...we offer a plethora of internships” (College of Communication @ BU, Boston University, 2002).

For the section entitled “about the department,” it is noted that the school “has the oldest public relations program and major...and stress[es] writing and speaking skills as critical to success” (Department of Mass Communication, Advertising and Public Relations, Boston University, 2002). It also is the site for the Edward L. Bernays chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America, established in 1968 (College of Communication @ BU, Boston University, 2002).

The curriculum is noted on the Boston University Web site, including ten public relations courses available to students. A public relations theory class, a research and a media relations course are all noted as required for the concentration. Others include: corporate public relations; public relations in nonprofit settings; governmental and political communication; communication internship; PRLab; video production for advertising and public relations; and political campaigning (College of Communication @ BU, Boston University 2002).
PR Lab is the name for the student-run public relations agency at Boston University. Students are required to: take the public relations theory class, plus a course outside the concentration (Writing for Communication), as well as second semester juniors or seniors to be eligible to enroll in the program. According to the Web site, students work with local nonprofit clients and write weekly status reports for their clients, which include such organizations as the Boston Ballet, the local Red Cross and the Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs. The Web site also indicates that Boston University also has a graduate-level public relations program, as well as journalism programs for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Conclusion

This chapter served to provide a framework for understanding public relations in the United States at its roots. As noted, public relations has evolved from its earliest days as a vehicle for promotion under a variety of circumstances (sometimes questionable) to its standing today as an important managerial practice that claims the attention of the highest ranking officials in many top organizations.

In the realm of education, over the previous few decades, public relations thought leaders have strongly embraced and refined guidelines that provide academia with parameters in which to formulate effective public relations programs. As noted, however, the most esteemed American university (in a survey) to prepare future practitioners does not offer public relations as an undergraduate major or concentration – instead, its journalism program is the standout curriculum. This fact provides fodder for
debate and discussion about the most effective way schools can prepare students for a career in public relations.
Chapter IV

A SURVEY SEEKING PROFESSIONAL OPINION ON THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AN EDUCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR A CAREER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Survey Intent

The aim of the survey (See Appendix B) was to gauge the opinion of public relations professionals about the proper preparation for a career in public relations. Statements were primarily aligned with issues pertaining to education and professional development. Respondents were asked to indicate: where deficiencies lie in entry-level job seekers; appropriate course selection in various disciplines; and where public relations preparation fits vis-à-vis degree requirements and internships. Since the public relations world is a reflection of the rapidly changing business environment, cultivating current responses on these matters is critical to gaining a clear picture of the opinion of those who may be in a position to hire entry-level employees. The survey provides a snapshot of these issues.

Survey Design

This survey seeks to determine professional opinion about 10 statements regarding entry-level preparation for a public relations career. Specifically, it first aims to uncover where skill deficits appear in new employees. It also asks which advanced liberal arts courses are most beneficial to students; what business courses will benefit the new professional; and a variety of questions concerning internships, the need
for a specific degree and the benefit of courses outside public relations (e.g., business; journalism).

All responses use a combination of the Likert scale and power ratings. For example, each statement requires the respondent to choose from numbers one through five. In questions one through three, five represents "most" and one represents "least." Therefore, each answer reflects the respondents' strength of opinion about courses students should choose, for example (as in questions two and three). Five means they strongly agree, four is agreement, three is neutral, two indicates disagreement and one shows strong disagreement. In later questions (four through ten), the respondents demonstrate how strongly they feel about a specific degree required for the profession, as well as proper academic and professional preparation for the career. In this later section, respondents had choices ranging from agree to disagree; five indicates strong agreement, four shows agreement, three indicates neutral, two suggests disagreement, one points to strong disagreement.

Survey Distribution and Collection

The survey was distributed primarily in hard-copy form and sent through the U.S. mail to contacts at various locations. Practitioners were provided with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to return the survey to the author. In several cases, the survey was sent via e-mail to those who requested that form of delivery. The potential respondents totaled 39 individuals; the aim was to receive at least half in return. The author also gave the professionals the opportunity to distribute the survey to colleagues in their respective
locations to expand the survey response. Surveys were distributed in November 2002. The requested response date was early December 2002.

The targets for the survey included public relations professionals who hire or interact with entry-level employees who perform public relations tasks. The author identified names through personal contacts she has developed in her work as a public relations practitioner in corporate, agency and self-employment environments. The individuals surveyed were primarily: in the healthcare field, located in the Northeast, situated at corporations, agencies and small businesses, and often had work experience totaling anywhere from 10 to more than 30 years in communications.

A total of 28 surveys were returned to the author. Of that group, 21 completed surveys are included in the survey results. Seven surveys were discounted for several reasons: significant incomplete answers, faulty responses or respondents who indicated that they are not exposed to entry-level practitioners.

Outcomes

Statement 1: The most apparent skill deficit in today's new college graduates applying for public relations positions is... (Please rank each of the following skills in terms of importance).

Respondents were asked in this section to provide input for eight alphabetized categories pre-selected by the author. The author chose these items based on her personal experience in determining critical skill sets for public relations professionals.
For the category "Analytical Thinking," seven respondents (33.3 percent) agreed very strongly (Answer 5) that it is a skill deficit. An equal number - seven (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4) that analytical thinking is a weakness in college graduates. A total of six respondents (28.6 percent) were neutral (Answer 3); one respondent (4.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2) with the concept that analytical thinking is a most apparent skill deficit in today's new college graduates. None of the respondents strongly disagreed that analytical thinking is a most apparent skill deficit (Answer 1). As the numbers demonstrate, in the total of eight categories in this section, "Analytical Thinking" ranks second highest as a deficit among new college graduates, according to survey participants.

"Awareness of Organizational Behavior" did not receive any responses that strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it is a most apparent skill deficit. However, seven respondents (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4); the majority, ten respondents (47.6 percent), were neutral (Answer 3); and four individuals (19 percent) disagreed (Answer 2) that awareness of organizational behavior is a skill deficiency. None strongly disagreed (Answer 1) that awareness of organizational behavior is a weakness among new college graduates.

For the topic "Business Understanding," two respondents (9.5 percent) agreed strongly (Answer 5) that this was a skill deficit; seven (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4); most, or a total of nine respondents (42.9 percent) were neutral (Answer 3); two (9.5 percent) disagreed (Answer 2); none strongly disagreed (Answer 1). One individual (4.8 percent) did not respond to the statement.
In the area noted as "Current Events Knowledge" one practitioner (4.8 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a skill deficit; five respondents (23.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4). The majority, nine individuals (42.9 percent) were neutral (Answer 3); four (19 percent) disagreed (Answer 2), and two respondents (9.5 percent) strongly disagreed (Answer 1) that current events knowledge was a skill weakness among new college graduates. In this instance, beyond the neutral responses, answers were evenly divided among those who strongly agreed/agreed with those who disagreed/strongly disagreed.

Respondents were asked to rate "Financial Comprehension" as a skill deficiency among new college graduates. None strongly agreed (Answer 5); eight individuals (38.1 percent) agreed (Answer 4); most, 11 practitioners (52.4 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), one (4.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2) and none strongly disagreed (Answer 1). One person (4.8 percent) did not respond to the statement.

An important proficiency, "Public Relations Tactical Competence" was included as well in the first statement. In this category, three respondents (14.3 percent) agreed strongly (Answer 5) that this capability was a skill deficit. Seven practitioners (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4); many, eleven individuals (52.4 percent) were neutral (Answer 3); and no respondents disagreed (Answer 2) or disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that this was a skill weakness among new college graduates. "Public Relations Tactical Competence" was the only category within this statement in which respondents did not disagree at all that this competency was a deficiency among new college graduates.
For "Speaking/Presentation Skills" three practitioners (14.3 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that this was a most apparent skill deficiency in new college graduates. The same amount, three individuals (14.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4). A total of ten respondents (47.6 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while five individuals (23.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2) that this was a most apparent skill weakness. None of the respondents strongly disagreed (Answer 1) that speaking/presentation skills presented a most apparent deficit in new college graduates.

The final category for this statement, "Writing Ability" received the strongest positive response. Eight practitioners (38.1 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that the ability to write was a most apparent weakness for new college graduates. Another six individuals (28.6 percent) agreed (Answer 4) with the statement. Four respondents (19 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while three disagreed (Answer 2) with the statement. None of the participants strongly disagreed (Answer 1). More than two-thirds of the respondents (66.7 percent) either strongly agreed or agreed that writing ability is the most apparent skill deficit in today's new college graduates applying for public relations positions.

In summary, Statement 1 revealed that "Writing Ability" was the most apparent skill deficit, with 66.7 percent of respondents either expressing strong agreement or agreement. However, an almost identical response was seen with "Analytical Thinking." A total of 66.6 percent of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that analytical thinking was a most apparent skill deficit. The last category in which a significant number of practitioners expressed agreement was "Public Relations Tactical
Competence." In this segment, 47.6 percent of the respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that it was a most apparent skill deficit.

Statement 2: Please identify the most useful advanced Liberal Arts courses for aspiring public relations practitioners (excluding core courses - e.g., English).

Individuals were asked in this section to rate eight disciplines (listed alphabetically) for their usefulness to the future public relations professional.

"Advertising" received the weakest response in all categories. None of the respondents strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course; only one practitioner (4.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Fifteen individuals (71.4 percent) gave a neutral response (Answer 3). Three respondents (14.3 percent) disagreed (Answer 2) that Advertising was a most useful course, and one person (4.8 percent) strongly disagreed (Answer 1). One individual (4.8 percent) did not respond to the statement.

"Business Writing" generated a strong positive return. Nine respondents (42.9 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course; six individuals (28.6 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Another six individuals (28.6 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). Interestingly, none of the respondents disagreed (Answer 2) or disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Business Writing was a useful advanced Liberal Arts course for aspiring public relations professionals.

For "Communications Theory," none of the respondents agreed strongly (Answer 5) that the course was most useful. Five practitioners (23.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4), while the majority of respondents, thirteen people (61.9 percent), were neutral (Answer
3) Only three respondents (14.3 percent) disagreed (Answer 2) that Communications Theory was a most useful advanced Liberal Arts course; none of the individuals strongly disagreed (Answer 1).

"Ethics" generated a surprisingly strong reply from survey participants. Nine respondents (42.9 percent) indicated that they strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course, another seven (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Only three respondents (14.3 percent) were neutral (Answer 3) and just two (9.5 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the practitioners disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Ethics was a most useful advanced Liberal Arts course.

The category that produced by far the most positive response was "Journalistic Writing." A total of 16 respondents (76.2 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that Journalistic Writing was the most useful advanced Liberal Arts course for aspiring public relations practitioners. Another two respondents (9.5 percent) agreed (Answer 4), while only three individuals (14.3 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). None of the participants disagreed (Answer 2) or disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Journalistic Writing was a most useful course. "Journalistic Writing" (as a most useful advanced Liberal Arts course) not only demonstrated the highest "strongly agree" percentage for this statement - - it scored the highest strong positive in the entire survey.

"Public Relations" elicited a fairly robust positive response, with seven practitioners (33.3 percent) indicating that they strongly agreed (Answer 5), while eight individuals (38.1 percent) agreed (Answer 4) that it was a most useful advanced course. Only four (19 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while just two (9.5 percent) disagreed
(Answer 2). None of the respondents strongly disagreed (Answer 1) that Public Relations was a most useful course.

In the category "Public Speaking," seven individuals (33.3 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course, while another six (28.6 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Six practitioners (28.6 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), and only one respondent (4.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the participants strongly disagreed (Answer 1), and one (4.8 percent) did not respond to the statement.

"Understanding the Media" received the second-highest "strongly agree" rating in the category. Ten respondents (47.6 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that this was a most useful advanced Liberal Arts course. Another nine practitioners (42.9 percent) agreed (Answer 4), and only two (9.5 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). None of the respondents either disagreed (Answer 2) or disagreed strongly (Answer 1). In total, 90.5 percent of the practitioners either agreed or agreed strongly that Understanding the Media was a most useful course. This represents the highest combined positive rating for any discipline in this category.

Statement 2 generated some unexpected results. "Understanding the Media," as noted previously, received the strongest positive response — revealing the largest percentage of participants (90.5 percent) indicating agreement or strong agreement that it was a most useful advanced Liberal Arts course for aspiring public relations professionals. However, "Journalistic Writing," saw 85.7 percent of respondents expressing agreement or strong agreement. Also noteworthy was its very high "strong agreement" percentage — 76.2 percent — demonstrating the practitioners' persuasive
message that journalistic writing ability is a must for aspiring public relations professionals. Finally the emergence of "Ethics" as the third most useful advanced Liberal Arts course, with 76.2 percent either agreeing or agreeing strongly, sends a directive as well. In an era in which corporate integrity is in question on a regular basis, it is clear that practitioners indicate that an ethics education in an academic environment is essential for the corporate communicator. It also demonstrates what the author asserted in the first chapter: that the company public relations professional should be prepared to be called upon to provide leadership in guiding corporate conduct at some point in his or her career.

3. Please identify the most useful Business courses for an aspiring public relations professional.

In this section, participants were asked to rank eight alphabetized courses, indicating those which are most to least useful business disciplines. Once again, the author relied upon her own career experience to construct the list of courses.

"Accounting" received the least positive response in all categories. None of the respondents strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course; only four (19 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Nine participants (42.9 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while six respondents (28.6 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). Two individuals (9.5 percent) disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Accounting was a most useful course for aspiring public relations professionals.
For "Finance," once again, none of the respondents agreed strongly (Answer 5) that this was a most useful course. However, seven individuals (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4). The majority, eleven practitioners (52.4 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while only three (14.3 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the respondents disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Finance was a most useful course.

When surveyed about "International Business," none of the participants strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course, although seven (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4) that it was. Six respondents (28.6 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while the majority, eight practitioners (38.1 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the respondents strongly disagreed (Answer 1) that "International Business" was a most useful course.

"Management" evoked a positive response. Four practitioners (19 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful course, while seven (33.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4). A total of nine individuals (42.9 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). None of the respondents either disagreed (Answer 2) or disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Management was a most useful business course. One individual (4.8 percent) did not respond to the statement.

"Marketing" received the strongest positive response among all business courses as most useful. Eleven practitioners (52.4 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was the most useful business course for an aspiring public relations professional. Another eight (38.1 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Only one respondent (4.8 percent) was neutral
(Answer 3), and none disagreed (Answer 2) or strongly disagreed (Answer 1). One individual (4.8 percent) did not respond to the statement.

For "Organizational Behavior," four respondents (19 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that it was a most useful business course, while five (23.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4). A majority, 12 practitioners (57.1 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). None of the survey participants disagreed (Answer 2) or disagreed strongly (Answer 1) that Organizational Behavior was a most useful business course.

"Research Methods" also elicited a surprisingly positive response. Four respondents (19 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5), and eleven (52.4 percent) agreed (Answer 4) that it was a most useful business course. Five individuals (23.8 percent) expressed a neutral response (Answer 3), and only one practitioner (4.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the respondents disagreed strongly (Answer 1). A total of 71.4 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that Research Methods was a most useful business course.

The last category for this statement was "Statistics." One individual (4.8 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that this was a most useful business course, while five practitioners (23.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4). The majority, ten respondents (47.6 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), while five participants (23.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the respondents strongly disagreed (Answer 1).

For Statement 3, "Marketing" was identified clearly as the most useful Business course for an aspiring public relations professional. It scored the highest "strongly agree" response (52.4 percent) as well as the overall highest positive reply, with 90.5 percent
either agreeing or agreeing strongly in response to the statement. Surprisingly, "Research Methods" obtained the second highest positive rating, with 71.4 respondents either agreeing or agreeing strongly that it was a most useful business course. Perhaps this result can be connected to the "Analytical Thinking" deficiency identified in Statement 1 -- in other words, that understanding research methods contributes to the development of analytical thinking. The third strongest response for a most useful business course was for the category "Management," with 52.3 percent of respondents indicating agreement or strong agreement. Finally, it should be noted that a trend toward positive was found for "Organizational Behavior." Although it had a significant neutral response, 42.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed that it was a most useful business course --and none of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was most useful.

4. Internships should be required for students to receive a public relations degree.

This statement was provided to test the extent to which the practitioners surveyed felt the need for students to have pertinent work experience typically obtained prior to graduation.

Not surprisingly, 13 respondents (61.9 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) with the statement. This statement received the second-highest "strong agreement" response for the entire survey. Another four individuals (19 percent) agreed (Answer 4), while three (14.3 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). Only one practitioner (4.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2), and none of the respondents disagreed strongly (Answer 1).
With 80.9 percent of practitioners expressing a positive response, it is clear that an internship prior to graduation should be a strong consideration for individuals who wish to pursue a career in public relations. This also correlates with one of the findings in Statement 1 -- that "Public Relations Tactical Competence" is an apparent skill deficit. One would theoretically obtain some tactical competence through a public relations internship prior to receiving a degree.

5. Public relations is a discipline best learned through work experience.

Practitioners in this statement were asked to evaluate the true nature of where applicable learning takes place for the public relations professional.

Consistent with the previous results, there was a very positive response to this statement. Ten respondents (47.6 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5), and another ten (47.6 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Only one practitioner (4.8 percent) was neutral (Answer 3). None of the participants expressed disagreement (Answer 2) or strong disagreement (Answer 1) with the statement.

The positive response to this issue was overwhelming, with a total of 95.2 percent of practitioners indicating strong agreement or agreement with the statement. It also correlates with Statement 4, about the importance of an internship. In essence, the message is identical -- that one must look for opportunities to participate in an actual public relations work environment to obtain working knowledge about the field.
6. Undergraduates should be required to take both liberal arts and business courses in preparation for a public relations career.

This assertion is a core issue within the body of the author's thesis and tests the practitioner viewpoint on current thinking about this subject.

Twelve respondents (57.1 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) with the statement, while another six (28.6 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Only two individuals (9.5 percent) were neutral (Answer 3), and one (4.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the respondents disagreed strongly (Answer 1) with the statement.

Once again, a very robust positive response was exhibited, with 85.7 percent of the survey participants agreeing or agreeing strongly with the statement. The data are consistent with the author's research, that select business courses as well as liberal arts disciplines play an important role in providing the proper academic training for the aspiring public relations professional.

7. It is necessary for graduating students to have a BA in public relations or communications to pursue a PR career.

Interestingly, this statement produced the most disagreement of any throughout the entire survey.

Only two individuals (9.5 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5), while one (4.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Three practitioners (14.3 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). However, seven respondents (33.3 percent) expressed disagreement (Answer 2) with the statement, while the majority, eight (38.1 percent) strongly disagreed (Answer 1).
The response to this statement challenges the assumption that public relations is a true profession. It indicates that one can have a generalist background and still obtain a public relations position. However, it does not challenge the issue of certain skill sets necessary to become a practitioner. Indeed, the education provided by a well-defined and well-managed public relations/communications curriculum will meet the needs of the public relations field.

8. A journalism degree is more valuable than a public relations or communications degree for an aspiring PR professional.

The author included this statement in the survey to investigate how severe the need is for writing ability as a primary skill in the public relations profession. In other words, the journalism degree is a very focused preparation on the ability to write well; the public relations or communications degree in more broad and perhaps more strategic in its emphasis.

The data received in response to this statement were perhaps the most evenly spread of any in the entire survey. Three respondents (14.3 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5), while five (23.8 percent) agreed (Answer 4) with the statement. Another five individuals (23.8 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). Five respondents (23.8 percent) disagreed (Answer 2), and three practitioners (14.3 percent) disagreed strongly (Answer 1).

The issue of journalism versus public relations or communications degrees is clearly an item of debate as indicated by the data results. It points to the fact that perhaps
more development is in order to prepare public relations and communications majors for the writing facet that is so critical to a successful public relations career. It reinforces how strongly professionals feel that the need to write well is an indisputably essential element of the public relations practice -- to the point where some would sacrifice the broad and strategic learning of public relations/communications degrees to obtain the qualified writer found through journalism programs.

9. An academic minor in business would be an advantage for a prospective candidate for a PR position.

This statement underscores the importance of the business connection to public relations by asking survey participants to judge a candidate by his/her commitment to understanding the principles of commerce in a very specific way.

A healthy number, eight respondents (38.1 percent), strongly agreed (Answer 5) with the statement, while another three (14.3 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Five practitioners (23.8 percent) were neutral (Answer 3). Only three individuals (14.3 percent) disagreed (Answer 2), and two (9.5 percent) strongly disagreed (Answer 1).

In total, more than half of the respondents (52.4 percent) supported the statement. The data reinforce the notion put forth in earlier statements and the author's research that a grasp of business principles (e.g., marketing, etc.) is a very important component of preparation for a public relations career.
10. Entry-level PR people with a liberal arts degree are generally well prepared for a career in public relations.

This statement represents the consummate question for the survey participants — indicating their overall satisfaction with the preparation of candidates who are querying them about public relations positions.

Three respondents (14.3 percent) strongly agreed (Answer 5) that new candidates are well prepared for a public relations career, while eight (38.1 percent) agreed (Answer 4). Seven individuals (33.3 percent) were neutral (Answer 3) in response to the statement, and three practitioners (14.3 percent) disagreed (Answer 2). None of the respondents strongly disagreed (Answer 1) that entry-level PR people with a liberal arts degree are generally well prepared for a career in public relations.

Since the trend of Statement 10 responses was more toward agreement to neutral, the data indicate that work needs to be done to better prepare today's graduates for the public relations profession. As noted earlier, there are disciplines such as writing and analytical thinking where gaps exist between what is needed and what is available. This information provides the opportunity for higher education to evaluate potential improvements to curricula that will ideally increase the high positive response to the issues raised by Statement 10.

Conclusion

This qualitative survey was very useful in providing a snapshot from public relations practitioners. Some of the data provided predictable insight: that the dearth of
writing skills among today's new college graduates still exists, and conversely it is an urgent need as a core competency. Writing is such a crucial capability that some practitioners indicated they would choose a journalism graduate over one who majored in public relations or communications -- presumably because the journalism student is better prepared to write well.

Another expected outcome was the vital connection seen between relevant early work experience in public relations and its place in the academic curriculum via internships. Public relations is clearly seen by practitioners as an experiential discipline, and those considering the career should take note while planning their studies.

Finally, the emergence of respect for business education as an important component of preparation for a public relations career was evident in the survey results. Practitioners indicated that they not only want students to take business courses, but some even see a business minor as a distinct advantage for entry-level hires, and in particular these individuals stressed marketing as a key course.

Surprises in the survey data were evident as well. The identification of analytical thinking as one of the most apparent skill deficits among new college graduates was unexpected. In addition, although not a complete shock, the very strong endorsement of ethics as an important course was a higher positive than the author anticipated. Also, the strong showing of research methods as a key business course was not predicted. Finally, the high negative rating for the importance of a Bachelor of Arts in communications or public relations was a disappointing result. It does, however, send a clear message that
curricula still need to be fine-tuned to present a program that is disciplined and respected as a tool for education and job preparation.
Chapter V

SUMMARY

Conclusions and Recommendations

The public relations field represents, now more than ever, the intersection of communication and commerce in the business world. This means that it requires the acumen of clear, concise verbal and written communication as well as the comprehension of the function of an enterprise in society.

Public relations is an energetic and vital service that is becoming more prominent. The corporate communicator is truly the go-between for the company and its constituencies -- such as the media, for example. And, in an era in which corporate reputation is being held to task in a very visible and public way, the perceptual aspect, as well as the true direction of company behavior, has become a critical component of the entire equation when evaluating an organization. This environment introduces a key opportunity for public relations -- and certainly speaks to the survey results indicating that ethics is a most useful liberal arts course for students.

As has been presented in previous chapters in this thesis, research has shown that public relations has a long and rich heritage in the United States. From revolutionary times, through the industrial age and onto the twentieth century, it has played a crucial role in influencing public opinion and has evolved from basic publicity to a strategic management function.
In the 21st century, the public relations world is at an interesting crossroad in its history. The challenges the discipline faces in the business environment have an influence on educational preparation as well.

Trends that are present today will continue to evolve as the discipline matures. For example, corporations continue to seek cost-efficiencies with full-time staff. The direct impact is that public relations departments will persevere with a lean number of employees. For the practitioner, this means that high productivity and efficiency will be the code words to success. In terms of skills, the current and future direction points to public relations professionals who have a generalist background — meaning they know a little about everything in communications — that will enable them to serve as project managers who outsource and evaluate the work given to public relations firms and freelance consultants. This is particularly true for internal and product communications. In addition, since public relations is considered overhead at many companies, tight budgets will force practitioners to continue to “sell” the value of their plans and explain the potential return on investment on a regular basis to their internal clients who fund their project work. Agency practitioners are also required to conduct these tasks for their corporate clients.

From an education standpoint, this means that the entry-level public relations employee must search for ways to be relevant almost immediately in the business environment. As the survey (See Appendix C) and research indicated, the need exists for employees who can conduct research effectively. This is a particularly valuable skill at
public relations agencies. In both agencies and corporations, new practitioners must also serve as problem solvers and understand and evaluate situations with confidence and speed -- two key elements of analytical thinking (a skill deficit cited in the survey). Students must find ways to meet these needs through their academic experiences. They must search out courses that will enhance their research abilities and select opportunities to hone their analytical skills -- perhaps through courses in logic, philosophy and public relations case studies. In addition, there is simply no replacement for one or more internships that will provide real-life experiences and strengthen the areas cited in the survey as weaknesses for new graduates.

Of course, the ability to write well will distinguish the new graduate among his/her peers. Students should look for every opportunity to obtain exceptional writing skills that emphasize journalistic as well as business styles. One of the key components of achieving this ability is to find an experienced editor who will vigorously correct and provide context for proper writing. It can be accomplished through: a professor; a mentor at an internship; and/or, as stated in the research, writing for the school newspaper.

The business connection to public relations cannot be overstated. As noted in the survey, hiring professionals are looking for students who have eagerly taken on business courses -- particularly marketing. Some have even indicated that graduates with a business minor might have an advantage when seeking work. This is consistent with the literature review, in which professors indicate that some business knowledge is becoming an expected element of education for the new public relations employee. In addition, the
requirement to explain the return on investment for projects is a routine aspect of the evaluation process in companies -- both for the corporate public relations practitioner and the account representative at a public relations firm. These professionals must be able to explain why money should be set aside for their programs, rather than be invested in sales or advertising, for example. The insight obtained from a basic business education will assist practitioners in providing financial justification for their work to the more numbers-oriented individuals from whom they obtain their funding.

It is important to note that understanding the media, as noted in the survey, is still considered a critical skill by public relations practitioners. The ability to generate publicity and deftly handle media responses are invaluable skills. As stated earlier, the challenging nature of speaking effectively to the media on a daily basis is a task that is one of the less popular aspects of public relations work. Therefore, those who are skilled in this area will be sought after for positions in both corporate and agency environments.

In terms of education, the internship can provide an effective introduction coupled with an academic course, ideally taught by someone experienced in the media world. If a student is looking for a public relations subspecialty that is usually marketable, media relations is certainly right at the top.

Finally, the survey data that illuminated practitioners' view of the unnecessary nature of a specific BA in communication or public relations to become a practitioner is troubling. It indicates, in the author's view, that a great deal of work needs to be done by the academic community to provide a uniform curriculum. The educational and professional worlds have tackled this issue through the Commission on Public Relations
Education over the years. However, if practitioners still look outside of the direct major for qualified candidates (especially pointing toward journalism), then the message is sent that the major is not doing enough to properly prepare students for the work world. From the author’s perspective, Syracuse University (as described in Chapter III of the thesis), identified by one survey as a school among the top three nationally, appears to "get it" with their undergraduate curriculum. The Syracuse program identifies public relations education as a discipline that incorporates specific writing styles, strategic business elements, internships and media savvy to adequately prepare students for the field. Other higher education programs should take note — for these are the essential components of an educational and professional development program in public relations.
Bibliography


Boston University, College of Communication @ BU. http://www.bu/edu/com/mcaptcha/pr/degrees_und.html. Retrieved 12/5/02.


Northwestern University, Department of Communication Studies.


Northwestern University, Medill School of Journalism.

Practitioners Say PR Graduates Are Better Prepared. From PR Central, Online News and Intelligence. Council of Public Relations Firms.


.../document?_m=81b5aee8f75dd0f1b35574381b27210b&_docnum=35&wchp=dGLbVz-1S1zV&_md5=dc566bebf362f84010d06.
Appendix A

Article
Appendix B

Survey
1. The most apparent skill deficit in today’s new college graduates applying for public relations positions is…

(Please rank each of the following skills in terms of importance.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Thinking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Organizational Behavior</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Events Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Comprehension</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations Tactical Competence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking/Presentation Skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Ability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Please identify the most useful advanced Liberal Arts courses for aspiring public relations practitioners (excluding core courses - e.g., English).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Theory</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalistic Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Media</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please identify the most useful Business courses for an aspiring public relations professional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Behavior</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Internships should be required for students to receive a public relations degree.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Public relations is a discipline best learned through work experience.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Undergraduates should be required to take both liberal arts and business courses in preparation for a public relations career.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It is necessary for graduating students to have a BA in public relations or communications to pursue a PR career.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A journalism degree is more valuable than a public relations or communications degree for an aspiring PR professional.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. An academic minor in business would be an advantage for a prospective candidate for a PR position.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Entry-level PR people with a liberal arts degree are generally well prepared for a public relations career.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please indicate additional comments below, particularly regarding skills issues and upcoming trends in public relations that may require additional competencies not mentioned previously.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title/Organization:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Profession:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Results of Survey
1. The most apparent skill deficit in today’s new college graduates applying for public relations positions is...
(Please rank each of the following skills in terms of importance.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Least</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Thinking</td>
<td>5 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Organizational Behavior</td>
<td>4 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Understanding</td>
<td>3 (42.9%)</td>
<td>3 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Events Knowledge</td>
<td>2 (42.9%)</td>
<td>3 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Comprehension</td>
<td>2 (38.1%)</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations Tactical Competence</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking/Presentation Skills</td>
<td>3 (47.6%)</td>
<td>2 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Ability</td>
<td>3 (28.6%)</td>
<td>2 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(No Resp.)

2. Please identify the most useful advanced Liberal Arts courses for aspiring public relations practitioners (excluding core courses - e.g., English).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Least</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>5 (4.8)</td>
<td>3 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Writing</td>
<td>5 (28.6)</td>
<td>3 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Theory</td>
<td>4 (61.9)</td>
<td>3 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>3 (42.9)</td>
<td>2 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalistic Writing</td>
<td>5 (9.5)</td>
<td>2 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>4 (38.1)</td>
<td>2 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>4 (28.6)</td>
<td>2 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Media</td>
<td>4 (9.5)</td>
<td>2 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(4.8)*

3. Please identify the most useful Business courses for an aspiring public relations professional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Least</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>4 (28.6)</td>
<td>3 (9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>5 (33.3)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>3 (33.3)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>3 (42.9)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5 (38.1)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Behavior</td>
<td>5 (23.8)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>4 (23.8)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>4 (23.8)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Internships should be required for students to receive a public relations degree.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Public relations is a discipline best learned through work experience.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Undergraduates should be required to take both liberal arts and business courses in preparation for a public relations career.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. It is necessary for graduating students to have a BA in public relations or communications to pursue a PR career.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. A journalism degree is more valuable than a public relations or communications degree for an aspiring PR professional.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. An academic minor in business would be an advantage for a prospective candidate for a PR position.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Entry level PR people with a liberal arts degree are generally well prepared for a public relations career.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate additional comments below, particularly regarding skills issues and upcoming trends in public relations that may require additional competencies not mentioned previously.

---

Optional:

Name:

Title/Organization:

Years in Profession: