

# **How U.S. Public Relations Education is the Best in the World, And Why That's Still Not Good Enough**

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Public relations in the United States has had a long and fascinating history. Traditionally, it was said that public relations started in the United States with Ivy Lee launching his practice shortly after 1900 and representing the Rockefeller family less than 15 years later, and Edward Bernays applying to PR the insights of his Uncle Sigmund Freud and notions of PR practitioners as both communication professionals and social scientists. It is a convenient starting point, but of course when one considers the history of competitive presidential elections going back to 1796, and the promotional and media relations efforts of social movements and then religious movements both starting in the 1820s, U.S. public relations goes back much farther than Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays.

In any case, it is the 20<sup>th</sup> century that is more relevant here. In a nutshell, the experience of George Creel and the Committee on Public Information during World War I taught American businessmen, politicians, and intellectuals that public relations could be used to sell anything—in this case, a war in Europe was sold to an isolationist American public. Individual public relations courses began being taught in the 1920s in business schools. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was finally founded in 1948, and it had its first code of ethics in 1950. But public relations took a long time to become a real profession, an academic discipline, or especially one part of U.S. mass communication or business administration research. At least through the 1970s, perhaps into the 1980s, the majority of U.S. public relations practitioners were former journalists, or were burned out employees moved out of some other part of a government agency or corporation, such as from sales or human resources or other parts. In the United States, it wasn't until about 1970 that

even the majority of journalists had a college degree, and while almost all now have a college degree, only about half have a degree in journalism.

Public relations lagged behind journalism on this; although I don't know of any authoritative figures exist on this, I suspect that the percentage of U.S. PR practitioners with a college degree is less than that of journalists and the percentage with a PR degree is significantly less than half. Public relations as a profession in the United States also is insecure about itself. In contrast to, for example, the Society of Professional Journalists, PRSA has a code of ethics that, at least officially, can be enforced at penalty of expulsion from membership, it has an accreditation process leading to "APR" after one's name, and it is accrediting only the public relations curriculum in various journalism/mass communication schools and speech/rhetoric departments. One could say that these steps represent a field that is highly professional and confident about that, but given public relations' image or reputation among journalists and the general public, one could also say that PRSA has almost been trying too hard. As Queen Gertrude put it in Hamlet, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

Now that a college degree is a basic prerequisite for any professional job in the United States, and public relations programs of some sort are available at scores, if not hundreds, of four-year colleges and universities, the PRSA has long worked with the Public Relations Student Society of America, the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication and numerous other professional and academic groups to assess and make recommendations about PR education. Most recently, the PRSA issued reports in both 1999 and 2006

on PR education. Here I give you highlights of the 2006 study, which was worked on by representatives of 12 organizations; it is called, “The Professional Bond: Public Relations Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Then, I want to assess the state of PR education today through the lens of U.S. university programs in public relations that have been certified by PRSA, in addition to or instead of, the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). The list of about 20 PR programs accredited by PRSA is not necessarily the U.S.’s best PR programs, but their standards and requirements have been deemed sufficient, probably good, and perhaps excellent by criteria set by PR professionals and educators. And rather than tell you how closely these PR programs matched the accreditation criteria, I think it’s more instructive to compare and contrast them with the 2006 education report making recommendations for where PR education should go.

Even the report’s “Executive Summary” is six pages long, so allow me to quote a small part from it:

“Based on five ‘waves’ of research, the Commission concludes that there is substantial agreement between educators and practitioners on what a public relations undergraduate student should learn, and therefore be able to perform at the practitioner entry level.

“Needed at this level: writing skills; critical thinking and problem-solving skills; ‘a good attitude’; an ability to communicate publicly; and initiative.

There also was agreement that a public relations education should include an internship, practicum or some other work expe-

rience in the field.

“The research also found considerable support for interdisciplinary study in subjects such as management and behavioral science.”

They also wrote, “A consideration of ethics should pervade all content of public relations professional education,” and, “If a curriculum cannot accommodate a dedicated ethics course, short one-hour courses or mini seminars can provide a meaningful ethics forum for undergraduates.” The report said that it “identif[ies]” diversity’s “major elements essential to public relations education.” It said, “Public relations educators must ensure that their students are prepared not only to be proficient in the use of the most recent communication technology, but also to understand and appreciate the societal ramifications of its use,” although it said, “student proficiency with such technology may be achieved largely through internships,” suggesting that PR courses not be primarily or solely dedicated to using technology such as Indesign, QuarkXpress, Photoshop, etc.

In a section called “Global Implications,” the Report and its executive summary said, “Public relations is now arguably becoming a global profession in an increasingly connected world where mutual understanding and harmony are more important than ever,” to be understood through seven “levels of analysis”: “cultural values and beliefs; laws and public policies; external groups, organizations and associations; institutional factors in the academic setting; international exchange programs; inter-personal factors within an institution; and intra-personal factors among students and educators.”

Overall, with regard to undergraduate public relations education, “the Com-

mission recommends more emphasis on ethics and transparency, new technology, integration of messages and tools, interdisciplinary problem solving, diversity, global perspectives and research and results measurement.”

Ultimately, the Report “identified the following courses for an “ideal” undergraduate major in public relations: ♦ Introduction to public relations (including theory, origin and principles); ♦ Case studies in public relations that review the professional practice; ♦ Public relations research, measurement and evaluation; ♦ Public relations law and ethics; ♦ Public relations writing and production; ♦ Public relations planning and management; ♦ Public relations campaigns; ♦ Supervised work experience in public relations (internship); ♦ Directed electives. Although some academic programs will find it difficult to offer seven courses devoted entirely to public relations, the Commission believes the topics covered in the courses above are essential for a quality public relations education.” The report continues: “A minimum of five courses should be required in the public relations major,” and that any “academic emphasis should minimally include the following courses: ♦ Introduction to public relations (including theory, origin and principles); ♦ Public relations research, measurement and evaluation; ♦ Public relations writing and production; ♦ Supervised work experience in public relations (internship); ♦ An additional public relations course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns.”

But I want to go into more depth on one aspect of the Report: what it says about educating PR students in disciplines and subdisciplines that traditionally are in business schools’ bailiwicks. The report’s “Research” section tells us in part: “un-

derstanding of business practices...were identified as deficiencies in entry-level practitioners.” It adds under “What a Public Relations Curriculum Should Include”: “the fundamentals of how organizations operate” and that at least graduate students should engage in “interdisciplinary study that might, for instance, include...management.....”

The report’s “Diversity” section implies that PR practitioners obtain some formal training in human resources management: “The diversity management aspect of public relations involves human resources, staffing, team, vendor and personnel functions.”

The report’s “Undergraduate Education” section implies that undergraduate students in PR already have been required or advised to take business school courses while at the same time reporting that “some of the content of those kinds of courses [‘business and social/behavioral sciences’] is being incorporated directly into the public relations curriculum.” But much more explicitly, the report says the “following knowledge and skills should be taught in an undergraduate public relations curriculum” and then lists, in part: “marketing and finance,” “various...economic...frameworks,” “organizational change and development,” “management concepts and theories,” “problem-solving and negotiation,” “strategic planning,” and “managing people, programs and resources.” Its general explanation reads, in part, that “Principles of public relations and management must be intertwined with and related to business.....” and cites a “growing need for students to be completely conversant in principles and practices of business....” And its specifics for “Content of Undergraduate Courses” include: “financial and investor relations,”



“marketing, management and organizational behavior, finance....,” with “directed electives” options including and starting out with “business management, marketing, accounting, finance, economics, consumer behavior....”

The Report’s undergraduate education section recognizes three different department/school models that dictate where PR is on a university campus: a “Journalism/Mass Communication Model” with “external requirements” including “accounting, marketing, business management and finance”; a “Communication/English/Liberal Arts Model” with “external requirements” including “statistics, economics....”; and a “Business/Management Model,” which includes “marketing and finance,” “marketing research and statistics,” “marketing management,” “consumer insight” and “business electives (e.g. public relations strategy, public relations planning, investor relations, crisis management, issues management, ethics, international business).”

So I looked at PRSA-certified undergraduate public relations programs, trying to align my own look at the programs with how the PRSA education report divided them up into types. Reviewing all of this was a joint effort between one of my former graduate assistants, Tom McMeekin, during Fall 2009, and based entirely on information publicly available on each institution’s Web site. Because Web site information can be incomplete, out-of-date, or outright confusing (for example, university requirements on one page, School of Journalism and Mass Communication core requirements on another page, and JMC electives on yet another page, with no cross referencing), I include this disclaimer that, despite my best efforts, some information here might be out-of-date and/or otherwise inaccurate.

## **Journalism/Mass Communication-Oriented Bachelor's Degree Programs in PR**

*Western Kentucky University* is a fairly typical university in how it measures up to the Report's ideal curriculum. It doesn't require a case studies course or a campaigns course, but instead it requires an international public relations course. Out of a list of 13 possible electives, of which students complete at least one, Integrating Marketing Communications is an option, along with Principles of Advertising or Advertising Interactive Design or PR Internship/Practicum. Western Kentucky also requires public relations students to take Principles of Macroeconomics; Critical Thinking about Management; and Basic Marketing Concepts, all of which are offered in the business school, not communication area, plus one of five basic statistics courses offered on campus. One might think that Western Kentucky was therefore relatively business-oriented in the PR degree program, but one still has to remember that because of ACEJMC accreditation rules, double majoring in public relations and business would be impossible within a four-year B.A. degree program, and even getting a "minor" in business would be difficult at best.

*Virginia Commonwealth University's* curriculum exactly fits the Report's recommendations, probably no coincidence because the communication school's director at VCU, Judy VanSlyke Turk, also was the Report's overall editor. The Virginia Commonwealth University curriculum is also noteworthy for offering numerous unusual electives, including Digital Public Relations; Media Relations; PR and Special Events; PR and Risk Communication; PR and Crisis Communication; PR and Reputation Management; PR and Integrated Brand Promotion; and PR and Employee Communication. However, students are required to complete only one elec-

tive, and the PR curriculum itself does not even recommend, let alone require, that students complete any business courses.

At the *University of Memphis*, PR students complete all seven courses recommended by the Report in either their department core or major core, plus take a course called Visual Journalism—an unusual requirement for PR majors. They also are required to complete two business courses: Principles of Marketing, and Organization and Management. They then choose one from three news reporting/writing courses, and then one from either internship or Survey of Advertising or Mass Media Web Management, also a highly unusual course in U.S. journalism schools. After all of this, Memphis PR students still have 21 credits for electives, so they can go back and pick up some of these earlier choices they didn't take, or finally take an ethics course (neither required nor recommended), or take various other courses in journalism or advertising. Memphis apparently doesn't have any public relations electives other than the ones I have already mentioned.

The *University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa*'s bachelor's degree program in public relations shows yet another variation. There, PR students must complete courses in Ad/PR design, news writing, PR writing, visual communication, and PR campaigns, but everything is in a choice of required courses—for instance, PR students may choose between mass communication law or mass communication research but are not required to complete both, and choose between PR management or online magazine writing or advanced PR design/layout. Ethics is only an elective, as are courses on PR/advertising audiences, political PR/advertising, international PR/advertising, and internship. Other than one news writing course, both journal-

ism and business are completely absent from Alabama's requirements or recommendations for PR students!

*Southeast Missouri State University's* PR degree also is rather limited and limiting in multiple ways. All students in the mass communication department must take a media writing course, a mass communication theory and research course; a media law course; an internship/practicum; mass communication history; and a mass media, society & technology-oriented course. Then PR majors must take PR Principles, Publication Editing/Production, PR Writing and Design, PR Cases, and a special PR topics course. While commendable that the PR students must take history and the technology & society course, they are missing PR management, PR campaigns; ethics; and a theory and/or research course that is oriented toward PR only or just PR and advertising. They also get only one real course in journalism and no courses in business are required or suggested.

At *Rowan University* in New Jersey, PR majors take roughly five of seven Report-recommended courses, although the PR planning course apparently does not include PR management. Interestingly, faculty have essentially replaced a law and/or ethics course with a required public opinion course, even though in PR programs that offer the course at all, public opinion is merely an elective for undergraduates and sometimes only available at the master's degree level. On one hand it's hard to criticize a PR program that is one of the few that appears to recognize centrality of "public opinion" to "public relations." But at the expense of media law, media ethics, PR campaigns, PR management and/or a required internship, it cannot have been an easy curriculum decision. Rowan offers a list of 18 electives for PR

students that is impressive in most ways except for its total lack of business courses. But surely because of ACEJMC accreditation limits, students may take only two of the 18. Law is one, and an entire course in media ethics is another, and internship is a third; an elective possibly unique to Rowan is Impact of PR on the News, and two less common ones are Health Communication and Political Communication, which seem to be more often offered in speech/rhetoric-based PR degrees. Apparently because of limited general education requirements at Rowan, PR students may take 13 courses anywhere on campus as “free electives,” which would be enough for at least a minor in a business field such as marketing (7 courses for marketing minor).

**Indiana University** in Bloomington is internationally famous for being housed in Ernie Pyle Hall, named after the great World War II correspondent, and for being an early journalism school, one with notable Ph.D. program alumni, etc. Although not nearly as well known for teaching PR (to put it mildly), it is, however, PRSA-certified and at least offers, if not requires, most courses the Report recommends. Exceptions are PR management, PR cases, and media ethics, which isn’t offered anywhere in the entire journalism school curriculum. On the other hand, Indiana is offering both International Public Relations and also the trendy Crisis Communications.

At **Eastern Kentucky University**, PR students must complete PR principles, a news-writing course, a design course, an internship, a PR management course, media law, media research, feature writing, and PR campaigns, in short everything the Report recommends except for media ethics and PR cases. And students still have at least 28 flexible credits to choose between PR service learning (apparently the only

PRSA-certified program that explicitly includes service learning in the PR curriculum!), PR event planning and management, integrated marketing communications, a portfolio development, PR planning, and a sports information course, or perhaps more journalism or business courses. But the typical PR graduate will graduate Eastern Kentucky having completed only one business course: Principles of Management.

*California State University at Fullerton* probably leads among journalism-based PR programs for giving students the most amount of flexibility in what they decide to take as PR students. All students must take media law and also history and philosophy of media. But then all students take only one course from a list of 8 “core electives” that includes important courses for PR such as ethics, visual communication, persuasive communication, and communication research, but also includes the less central “Mass Media & Ethnic Groups.” PR students have their own 5-course core of two writing courses, PR principles, PR management, and internship, but then they choose one out of three writing or broadcast production courses. Among a list of six PR electives, they must take at least one but cannot take more than two from among research; entertainment PR; corporate & nonprofit PR; the ever-trendy crisis communications; event planning & management; and a mock PR agency. In short, it’s hard for an employer to know what a PR graduate from Cal State Fullerton has or hasn’t learned without looking at a transcript. It is quite possible to graduate with a PR degree from Cal State Fullerton having completed only three courses dedicated to PR plus an internship, and not including research, ethics, or much in the way of PR materials design and layout (on paper or online). On the other hand, Cal State

Fullerton has an extensive list of recommended “collateral” courses for PR students that includes 11 business courses, about one-third of the total number of options.

At **Brigham Young University**, PR is an “emphasis,” along with advertising and journalism areas. PR students complete courses in media writing, PR principles, PR research, media law and ethics, news reporting, PR writing and production, strategic planning, PR campaigns, and internship—the entire list of 7 areas recommended by PRSA. They also choose one course in each of three other groups of courses, in which they can take courses as important as media audiences, media advocacy, another one in media law, another one in media ethics, or global communication, or courses less relevant to PR majors such as media and world religions, or gender/race/class and media. At BYU, PR students must complete both Principles of Accounting (apparently the only PRSA-certified PR program that requires an accounting course) and Marketing Management.

Finally, at **Ball State University** in Indiana, PR students also are being well served by the curriculum there, at least as recommended by the Report. They take courses in visual communication, PR/advertising writing, news writing, PR principles, media law, media ethics, PR “techniques,” PR publications, research, PR planning/management, and PR campaigns, then choose from various electives in journalism and speech/rhetoric courses. They also are required to take one economics course, management principles, marketing principles, and sociology principles. How do they do that? Sixty-three credits, or more than half the student’s total college credits are either in the College of Communications, or outside the College of Communications but required for the PR degree.

## **Speech/Rhetoric-Oriented Bachelor's Degree Programs**

**Valdosta State University**, in Georgia, is one of several bachelor's degree programs with a speech/rhetoric degree, in this case, a B.F.A. degree in speech communication! Required courses in the PR major are Contemporary Communication Theory; Small Group Communication; Contemporary PR; Electronic PR Applications; PR Writing; PR Document Layout and Design; Fundamentals of Cross-Cultural Communication; and Communication Research Methods. Electives include Persuasion; Theories of Public Communication; Psychology/Semiotics of Communication; Rhetorical Criticism; PR Research; Integrated Communications; PR Plans and Campaigns; and PR Law and Ethics. So this curriculum requires only four of seven courses that the Report recommends, and I predict many PR students as well as PR professionals, are surprised, at best, to see that, at Valdosta State, PR campaigns, media law and ethics are merely electives. I also would make an educated guess that many PR students don't take the PR law and ethics course.

At the **University of Maryland at College Park**, where the journalism school famously dumped its entire PR program, the program moved to the Department of Communication. And this shows in the curriculum, which is heavy on speech/rhetoric theory, business courses are nonexistent, and apparently numerous journalism courses have simply had "in PR" or "for PR" added to their names. Thus at Maryland, the PR students are required to complete Communication Principles and Practice; Critical Thinking and Speaking; Argumentation and Debate; News Reporting and Writing for PR; News Editing for PR; Intro to Communication Inquiry; PR Theory; PR Techniques; Specialized Reporting and Writing in PR; Internship; Re-



search Methods in Communication; Interpreting Strategic Discourse; and Senior Seminar in PR (a cases/campaigns course). Thus, Maryland's speech/rhetoric department manages to roughly offer 5 of 7 recommended requirements, but missing from the requirements and even from Maryland's electives are a planning/management course and a media law/ethics course! Instead, Maryland's PR students choose electives including PR Programs, PR Theory & Techniques, and Speechwriting, plus a mish-mash of theoretical and historical courses (but no other journalism or business courses) that include Rhetoric of the 1960s, Renaissance & Modern Rhetoric Theory, and Ancient & Medieval Rhetorical Theory! Clearly, Maryland has taken a curricular position that PR is primarily about language usage and also face-to-face communication.

The *University of Cincinnati*, which has a 30-credit Certificate Program in PR, requires 5 of 7 courses that the Report recommends, and then requires students to complete two electives, a complete list of which includes a law and ethics course and a PR research course that the Report would require. The other nine electives are in journalism or speech/rhetoric, with the sole exception of Introduction to Marketing. For someone who already has a bachelor's degree in another field, this 30-credit PR certificate would be a big boost to get into PR, but one would wonder why that person wouldn't simply get a 36-credit master's degree in PR at an institution that would admit them without a bachelor's degree in PR. Moreover, the University of Cincinnati is a private university, so that 30-credit certificate is not cheap, probably at least US\$20,000 for tuition and books.

Virginia's *Radford University* also has a speech/rhetoric-based undergra-

duate PR program, but one knows this primarily from what other courses are offered in the School of Communication there, and only slightly from courses that PR students are required to complete. At Radford, the 11 departmental and major required courses include all those recommended by the Report, with the exceptions of media law, media ethics, PR planning/management, and any course in design and technology; even an internship is required. This' program's speech/rhetoric-orientation is suggested by the requirement of courses called Teamwork, and Business and Professional Communication. The other unusual required course is Crisis Management and Communication, but crisis communications is now a trendy and glamorous area of PR teaching and research, not necessarily evidence of speech/rhetoric influence in the curriculum. PR students' suggested electives are Organizational Communication, Persuasion, Intro to Advertising, Advertising Analysis, and Digital Imaging. With these and many other journalism, advertising, and speech/ rhetoric-oriented electives, it's easy to forget that Radford doesn't even offer, let alone require, a course in media law, media ethics, PR management, public opinion, etc.

At *Ohio Northern University*, PR is in the same department with journalism, broadcasting, speech/rhetoric, and theatre, but there are plenty of non-speech and non-theater courses to choose from. The PR core includes only roughly five of seven courses that the Report recommends, missing media law and ethics and a planning/management course. But an "issues" course that is one of nine electives, of which PR students must complete four, with the other eight more or less evenly divided between print journalism, broadcast journalism, and speech/rhetoric-

oriented courses. PR students must take two from another list of 7 electives and, somewhat impressively, four of them are business courses: Behavioral Management for Business Planning (whatever that means), Marketing for Business Planning, Human Resources Management, and Business and Society. As far as I know, Ohio Northern University's PR program is the only PRSA-certified program that requires or recommends a course in human resources management.

At *Indiana State University*, PR students take required courses in research; media writing; media law, intro to PR, either an internship or a senior "capstone" course; a campaigns course; and an advanced PR writing course called "tactics," but also "Introduction to Persuasion Theory." PR cases and communication ethics are electives, and PR planning and PR management are not offered, let alone required, but other electives are entirely in print journalism, broadcast journalism, and speech/rhetoric, including a variety of largely-to-completely choices irrelevant to journalism and PR students such as Media and Popular Culture; Oral Interpretation of Children's Literature; Speech Communication for the Teacher; and Literature and Public Life!

### **Business administration-Oriented Bachelor's Degree Program**

*Utica College, legally and financially part of Syracuse University*, believes it has solved the problem of whether PR degrees should be housed in a school of communication (or a communication department within a school of arts and sciences), or in a business school by offering PR majors in each! PR majors in the arts and sciences school take 6 of 7 core courses recommended by the Report, with the exception of law and ethics. They then choose five electives out of 14 choices for

a public relations concentration or a similar number for a sports communication concentration. The PR concentration list allows a student to focus on journalism-related courses, marketing and advertising-oriented courses, speech/rhetoric-oriented courses, more PR courses, or some combination thereof. Business courses on that electives list includes: Introduction to Contemporary Business; Principles of Business Management; and Elements of Advertising; and Communication Law also is an elective. Communication ethics, however, is completely missing. Interestingly, the sports communication concentration within the PR major includes three journalism and media related courses, as if sports journalists are merely part of sports PR (this seems to be true, but one doubts most sports journalists would admit it), and the sports communication concentration includes several sports management courses that one might expect to otherwise see in the curriculum of a progressive business school. Even more unusually, the Public Relations-Journalism Studies major elsewhere on campus at Utica College, in its School of Business and Justice Studies, includes more journalism courses than the arts/science school's PR major, and includes no business courses!

### **Master's degree education**

The Professional Bond's executive summary also reported, "In qualitative research conducted for this report, 18 public relations leaders supported several types of graduate public relations programs rather than endorsing the MBA or dismissing public relations graduate education as unnecessary. The Commission's research suggests that graduate education should move toward understanding business, management and public relations as strategic management functions."

Therefore, the report said, “The graduate student should master the following content areas beyond undergraduate competencies: ♦ Public relations theory and concepts; ♦ Public relations law; ♦ Public relations ethics; ♦ Global public relations; ♦ Public relations applications; ♦ Public relations management; ♦ Public relations research; ♦ Public relations programming and production; ♦ Public relations publics; ♦ Communication processes; ♦ Management sciences; ♦ Behavioral sciences (which in the United States generally refers to psychology, operations research, organizational theory, and several brain-related sciences); ♦ Internship and practicum experience; ♦ Thesis and capstone project and/or comprehensive exam.”

But it is in the 2006 report’s “Graduate Education” section in which it made its strongest arguments in favor of more business school and business school-like education for PR students. Among the list of “Revised Content Areas” since the predecessor 1999 report is “Management sciences. This area should include accounting, finance, management, marketing, diversity management and strategic integrated communication applications.” This section of the report also offers three different models for master’s degree work centered in PR, the first of which is preparing students for doctoral programs. The second “provides advanced career preparation through coursework in public relations and management disciplines,” including “accounting, finance, marketing, strategic planning.” The third, “studies for a specialization in public relations,” includes suggestions for “Collateral Electives,” which in turn include “business/management...international marketing or management, sports management....”

Finally, the report’s “Distance Learning” section reports that “The University

of Maryland's University College offers a master's degree in management and public relations" and "Syracuse University has a campus component plus online instruction for its master's of public relations and management."

The report did not leave alone PR faculty. Its "Faculty Credentials" section states that, in addition to a doctorate, it is "highly desirable" for PR faculty to possess broad knowledge of, among other subjects, "business." Later, it adds, "Commission research suggested that graduate education content should move toward understanding business and management and public relations as a strategic management function."

Again, the master's degree programs that are PRSA-certified provide a small sample by which to look at how U.S. PR education is doing when compared/contrasted to the Report's goals. It is worth pointing out that the PRSA's goals or standards for PR curriculum are in many ways "more of the same" from the undergraduate curriculum, with the only entirely new curriculum areas for graduate students being global PR, PR publics, management sciences, and behavioral sciences, in addition to a master's thesis or other major graduate student project.

At **Ball State University**, the PR master's degree program includes courses in general mass communication theory, PR theory, general mass communication research methods, PR research methods, PR management, PR case studies, and PR campaigns, then choose between a business emphasis (which requires courses in management and organizational behavior, financial accounting, marketing, and economics) or a speech/ rhetoric emphasis or a "public affairs" emphasis (essentially political communication), or a sport communication emphasis, each "emphasis" be-

ing accomplished with only four courses. Regardless of which emphasis Ball State PR master's degree students pursue, however, they get no courses in global PR or behavioral sciences, and little on PR publics, plus only business emphasis students learn very much about management.

At ***Brigham Young University***, the master's degree program is quite bare bones, with a surprisingly limited number of courses offered overall, and only two specifically in public relations: "Integrative Persuasive Communications" and "Public Relations Theory and Leadership." While BYU master's students will learn about theory and research methods they had less of or none of as bachelor's degree students, the BYU M.A. is arguably quite insufficient as a true master's degree in public relations.

At ***Eastern Kentucky University***, the PR-related master's degree isn't even offered by the Department of Communications. Instead, the university offers an MBA degree with an "Integrated Communications Track." Students in this program will take, among other courses, Strategic Business Communications, Business Strategy, Leading and Managing Organizations, Marketing Management, Integrated Managerial Communication, Integrated Public Relations, and Integrated Marketing. It's a pretty good alternative to a master's degree in public relations through a communication department or school, but it is not clear that the degree includes any mass communication or PR theory, any mass communication or PR research methods, communication law and ethics, or global PR. In addition, this MBA does not include an internship or a thesis/project.

At ***Indiana University***, the master's degree program in journalism/mass

communication also remains more geared toward journalism and general mass communication courses. The only three PR-oriented courses in the M.A. curriculum are: PR management, PR campaigns, and PR for nonprofits, the first two of which are widely though not universally available in undergraduate programs and the latter of which (PR for nonprofits) is a narrower course and one not necessarily of interest or relevance to all students.

At **Radford University**, the master's degree program is only 30 credits, as contrasted with the usual 36, so most students take only 10 courses instead of 12. Students writing a thesis take only five core courses, the thesis, and three electives, while non-thesis students take only five core and five elective courses. The core courses are: theory, research methods, organizational communication, a seminar on PR and society, and an unusual, perhaps unique, course in communication training and development. Radford does offer its PR graduate students a wide range of electives in case studies, political communication, leadership, conflict management, health communication, law and ethics, issues management, change and innovation, and several other speech/rhetoric-oriented course. But the average M.A. graduate from Radford has a partial and/or shallow exposure to most areas the Report recommends, including almost nothing in business-oriented "management science." Certainly Radford's PR graduate students are not all taking any courses in that University's business school.

At **Rowan University**, the M.A. students in PR must complete: Publication Layout and Design (or be waived out of it), PR theory and publics (called "Overview"!); Communication Research; PR Case Studies (1-credit); PR Planning (2 cre-



dits); two courses in PR writing (called “Techniques” courses); a thesis or project; and four electives, the choices of which include internship; Online PR; School PR; organizational/ management PR; Strategic Public Affairs (for a “public affairs emphasis”); and for an education PR emphasis, non-communication courses in Foundations of Education and psychology. As at many other M.A. programs in PR, Rowan students are taking no course dedicated to law and/or ethics, nothing global or international or in real “management sciences,” and only “education emphasis” students are getting even one course in the “behavioral sciences.” To give Rowan some credit, its list of 24 one- and two-credit courses (two of which are required and already mentioned) in PR and also public opinion is extremely impressive. Rowan’s faculty has realized that media planning/buying, crisis public relations, PR-only law/ethics, grant-writing, planning special events, and other subjects are not worth an entire semester and three credits, although I don’t agree with all of Rowan’s choices to limit to one credit each, such as news writing or global PR.

The master’s degree in PR at the *University of Maryland at College Park* is, as one would expect, more of the same from the speech/rhetoric-oriented undergraduate program, except that at M.A. and Ph.D. levels students are encouraged to take courses in other University departments, ranging from business management to government to anthropology. But in the Communication Department, the core is at least three courses selected from PR management, PR publics, global PR, PR special topics, PR research, internship, and optional thesis. Electives include any of those courses not taken as requirements, plus a list of 13 courses, none of which are PR-only courses, and none of which get closer to the core of PR than speechwriting,

social change, organizational communication, persuasion/attitudes, and health communication. Again, this PR graduate program does not come close to meeting the Report's recommendations: it includes no courses in law, ethics, or theory, and students must make a special effort to take electives outside the Department of Communications to get any course in management science or psychology.

Finally, *Virginia Commonwealth University's* M.S. degree in "strategic public relations" is, like Radford's, only a 30-credit program. With Turk directing the VCU communication school, does the master's degree there come as close to meeting the Report's recommendations as the undergraduate program does? Yes. Required courses include PR in a "digital environment"; PR research and evaluation; PR management; PR law and ethics; organizational communication; media relations; PR in global environment; and PR campaign design/implementation. Electives include media-government relations; media and public opinion; and PR cases and programming; students not interested in those can take at least two non-communication courses, probably in business.

### **Why hasn't U.S. PR Education Met the Professional Bond Goals from 2006?**

The report was honest in some ways and not in others about how and why U.S. public relations education is not meeting the goals and standards that have been set for it by the group of academic and professional organizations who authored the 1999 and 2006 reports on U.S. public relations education.

***Shortage of PR faculty with Doctorates:*** Specifically, the 2006 report's executive summary "notes that the production of doctoral graduates has not kept pace with the need, either in education or in the practice. So it recommends academic

credentials and ‘increased partnerships with professionals [practitioners] and professional organizations to help educators stay current with the practice of public relations.’” In fact, the report recommends “‘the development of additional doctoral programs where undergraduate and master’s degree public relations program strength and faculties exist’ and lists a series of initiatives to help achieve this outcome.”

Make no mistake: a shortage of PR professors in the US who hold doctorates (in any field) is a problem for numerous reasons. And the shortage exists even though persons with Ph.D.s in marketing or advertising or general mass communication or even just journalism with substantial professional experience in PR probably would be sufficient in place of persons with Ph.D.s in PR. The reason why the shortage is a problem is that faculties without a lot of Ph.D.s on them cannot start doctoral programs of their own and—more importantly and more urgently—faculties that are short on professors who hold Ph.D.s are less likely to be both able and willing to teach many master’s degree-level courses that the Report recommends and that it is otherwise understood are desirable, if not necessary, at the master’s degree level.

***ACEJMC Accreditation:*** However, the Report omits the other major reason why many, if not most, of the 88 U.S. universities that, as of 2006, both offer a PR curriculum and are accredited by ACEJMC are not meeting and will not meet the ideal goals and standards established by the PRSA-led Professional Bond study. That reason is that ACEJMC accrediting standards require that PR students, like other students in journalism and mass communication programs, take no more than 40

semester credits in their major, take at least 80 semester credits outside their major, and take at least 65 of the 80 credits in the traditional liberal arts and sciences. The emphasis on liberal arts and sciences in ACEJMC accreditation standards is based on an idea that goes back in the United States about 140 years: that journalists should have a well-rounded education with which to observe, report, and write on the world. And, yes, when, U.S. journalism programs through the 20<sup>th</sup> century started adding courses in radio production, television production, photography, photojournalism, graphic arts, advertising, public relations, film studies, and/or speech communication and rhetoric studies, the concept of the well-rounded liberal arts graduate who just happened to major in journalism was merely imposed on the new majors by what is now ACEJMC.

The net result has been that ACEJMC accreditation standards basically tell PR and advertising students and professors, among others, that taking courses in philosophy or sociology is more important than taking courses in marketing, management, finance, business law, etc. (or even economics at those universities at which economics is in a business school or college rather than in a school or college of liberal arts or arts and sciences). In other words, the idea of professional communicators as primarily liberal arts graduates stems from a time when only journalism was envisioned as a communication profession and certainly from a time when PR practitioners were primarily former journalists working with journalists, and advertising was more about creativity and/or persuasion, rather than today's world in which PR and advertising practitioners have broader portfolios (Integrated Marketing Communications, anyone?), and much of it requires, or is ideally managed by,

someone with a strong background in multiple areas of business administration and economics.

***Institutional Traditions and Imperatives.*** One explanation, obviously, is that PR curricula with roots in something other than the “Business/Management Model” are less likely to have business-related coursework in place, business or business-oriented professors in place, close relationships with (other) business professors, and so on. (The Report only implies and doesn’t explicitly note that just as there are at least three models of undergraduate PR education and at least three models of graduate PR education, there also are at least three “models” of PR professors. The report’s most emphasized points about PR faculty are: 1. there was a shortage of qualified ones in 1999 and it was worse by 2006; 2. that PR faculty should have a doctorate [see #1, along with increasing enrollments]; and that certain backgrounds are inadequate or even inappropriate for PR education. For instance, the report pointedly notes: “Departments and programs that rely on superficial similarities in writing style by hiring technically trained journalism, English and business writers in place of credentialed public relations instructors are failing to provide their students with a modern, competitive public relations education.”])

And PR faculty whose professional, educational and/or teaching backgrounds are in what the report refers to as the “Journalism/Mass Communication Model” or the “Communication/English/Liberal Arts Model” surely are less likely to devote the considerable amount of time/effort necessary to become dramatically more knowledgeable in management theory, finance, accounting, MIS/IT, economics, etc., or even in areas of marketing other than PR, integrated marketing commu-

nications, and advertising.

Second, PR faculty members who do not already teach in a business/management-oriented department/school/college are unlikely to get much help from professors in those units (which I have generically referred to here as “business schools”). At every institution in which I have been enrolled and/or taught over the past nearly 30 years, the relationship as a whole (with rare exceptions among individual faculty) between business professors and journalism/mass communication professors has ranged from ignoring each other (intentionally or not), to disdain, to defensiveness, to outright hostility. Only the most obvious evidence is the almost total lack of business/economics scholars publishing in mass communication journals, or journalism/mass communication professors publishing in business or economics journals; the lack of business and economics professors active in AEJMC, or mass communication professors active in business/management academic organizations; the very small number of business schools with media management courses, let alone specializations/concentrations or degrees; and the very small number of joint degree programs in journalism/mass communication units and business schools leading to the M.A./M.B.A. combination.

***What Students Are (Not) Requesting/Demanding, and Students’ Quality.***

Our students are not very much help in meeting Professional Bond goals. For example, I am completing my ninth year directing a master’s degree program in mass communication; this year, it enrolled about 70 students, and this year, like every year, the overwhelming majority of students were interested in PR only or PR and advertising. (I am aware that this probably is not typical.) After teaching hundreds

of M.A. students, reading their applications, talking with them about internships and careers, and more, I have made several observations about our PR-oriented (graduate) students, who may be typical.

One observation is that they often use the term “marketing” in terms of what they want to study and/or what kind of job they would like to get. Yet few of them considered obtaining an M.S. in marketing or an M.B.A. with a marketing concentration/ specialization. There appear to be two major reasons for this: the first is that students usually believe that PR, advertising, and integrated marketing communications are all there is to marketing. No one, not to mention themselves, has ever told them that marketing also includes product/service design characteristics, packaging, pricing, sales, placement/distribution (including but not limited to retailing), various aspects of strategic planning, and serious (not merely superficial or pop) knowledge of consumer behavior, including psychology. (I concede that, in at least the United States, the term “marketing” has been largely debased—newspapers and Web sites are filled with employment ads for “marketing” jobs that are nothing more than sales—but potential graduate students looking around at master’s degree programs should know or find out what “marketing” means.)

Second, I am convinced that some graduate students in PR, advertising, and/or integrated marketing communications in J&MC programs are there (in my case, here) precisely because they don’t want to be in a business school and they do not want to take courses in areas such as accounting, economics, finance, management theory, IT/MIS, etc. (In a few cases, students have enrolled in our M.A. program after dropping out, or perhaps flunking out, of an M.B.A. program at another

university). Students in our M.A. program must take at least one course, and may take up to three courses, outside the School of Communication, but PR students never seem eager to take more than one course in the M.B.A. program (which is where I direct them) and often are not eager to take even one. Moreover, in the mass communication research methods (quantitative and qualitative) course I teach, every semester some students try to use journal articles (on subjects other than PR, advertising, or integrated marketing communications) from management and general marketing journals for their homework assignments until I remind them that they may use only those journal articles from mass communication or communication journals that are about mass communication-related subjects and, preferably, primarily or solely based on mass communication theories. (This seems to be due more to a lack of understanding about what PR is and isn't, and what marketing is and isn't, than to real interest in business generally.) Then there was my visit in late 2008 to a journalism school at a major Midwestern U.S. research university during which a professor told me that a few PR students on his campus plan to work as wedding planners(!)

All of this and other experiences have resulted my observation that it is as if the M.A. in PR, advertising, integrated marketing communications, or mass communication with a concentration/specialization in those areas is considered or at least is being treated as an "M.B.A. lite." (And this in a metropolitan area with a half a dozen M.B.A. programs, and half a dozen others within commuting distance.)

In any case, PR students (both undergraduate and graduate) need to know about business and economics more than ever, and it seems to me the only way to



ensure that happens is to make business and economics courses into requirements, not merely “directed” or “collateral” electives, for PR students. But it also seems that a PR student who doesn’t know enough about PR do this on his/her own doesn’t know much about today’s world of public relations or marketing.

***Where Public Relations is in the University Curriculum.*** As introduced above, for historical, political, financial and even occasionally academic reasons, where PR has ended up being housed in a university campus—in a business school, in a pure journalism and mass communication department or school, in a speech/rhetoric-oriented department or in a hybrid journalism/mass communication/speech-rhetoric department or school has had an overwhelming impact on how PR education is intellectually oriented from one campus to the next and therefore as an academic discipline as a whole.

I believe that as time goes along PR as a discipline will not be able to sustain the notion—perhaps it already is a polite fiction—that PR education being based in journalism and mass media education, or in business and management education, or in speech and rhetoric based education, are merely alternative models for PR education and that none of them are better than any other. “The Professional Bond” report respectfully discussed each alternative orientation/location of PR education and was not at all critical of any of them. But it is clear that at the master’s degree level, there is a consensus among the relevant U.S. academic and professional PR organizations that wrote the 2006 report that master’s degree programs need to move toward a business and management orientation, away from a speech and rhetoric orientation, and that PR programs are tenable in a department/school of journalism

and mass communication only to the extent that those academic units can teach the business administration and management-related courses or facilitate the teaching of them by business schools.

At the bachelor's degree level, it is merely less obvious that PR education needs to move toward more of a business administration and management orientation. But it is still clear, especially when one looks at faculty credentials. Full-time, tenured speech/rhetoric professors almost always have doctoral degrees in speech/rhetoric or perhaps English-language literature, but almost never in mass communication, journalism, or any field of business administration. They also rarely have much professional experience in anything other than higher education, usually having moved directly from an undergraduate program to a master's degree program to a doctoral program. Certainly it is highly unusual for a full-time speech/rhetoric professor to have any professional experience in PR (or in journalism either). So to the extent that PR students want or need to have professors who have doctorates in PR and/or professional experience in PR, U.S. speech/rhetoric professors offer something different than what students most want and most need unless their interests happen to align around health communication, political communication, and science communication.

When one looks at the core seven courses suggested by The Professional Bond report, it also is fairly clear who should be teaching the courses. Perhaps Introduction to Public Relations could be taught by a wide variety of professors, including those without a Ph.D. and those with Ph.D.s in journalism, mass communication, media studies, public relations, marketing, or general business/management.

But the PR Case Studies course that “review[s] the professional practice” requires an instructor with professional PR experience, which is far more likely going to be a journalism/mass communication professor or a business administration/management professor than the typical speech/rhetoric professor. The same is true for teaching PR law and ethics, practical PR writing and “production” (presumably designing PR materials such as press releases, media kits, booklets, brochures, pamphlets, booklets, newsletters, Web sites, etc.), PR planning and management, PR campaigns, PR internships, and the practical aspects of PR research, measurement, and evaluation. While the typical Ph.D. in speech/rhetoric has studied research methodologies, studied methods typically have been mostly qualitative (rhetorical analysis-based) while PR firms and corporate PR departments engage primarily in quantitative research, and to the extent that measurement/evaluation is theory-based, is cause-effect-oriented (i.e. empirical), and cannot be determined merely by assertion (no matter how well argued) as much humanities-oriented analysis, including rhetorical, does.

***Minimal Public Relations Research is on Public Relations Education.*** Obviously the place of PR education in U.S. higher education is not only a matter of what is or is not in the curriculum, who the professors are, where PR education is housed in the university, or even the combination of all those factors, but also PR education’s status and quality is partially dependent upon what research is being done by PR professors and about PR education. Many business schools, journalism/mass communication departments/schools, and speech/rhetoric departments have strong traditions of research, even entertaining the possibility of less so among

JMC departments/schools. There is significant, but hardly overwhelming, research about PR education, and the international, refereed, scholarly journal that I edit, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, has received a lot of that PR education research as article manuscript submissions, some of which was accepted for publication and then disseminated that way. But all of this has not resulted in PR education being moved out of journalism/mass communication programs if PR already is there, nor is that likely. And the relative lack of research by PR faculty (on PR education or any other aspect of PR) on a given campus is, frankly, unlikely to result in PR education being discontinued or moved at all (regardless of where it is or where it could go) because of strong student demand. So research has largely not driven the place, role, or curriculum of PR programs except in what could be called the “growth areas”: health, political, and science/environmental communications.

### **What is Likely to Happen to U.S. Public Relations Education?**

Current trends in enrollments suggest that the number of public relations students, and therefore the number of PR graduates, at least will remain steady, if not increase, for the foreseeable future. So choosing to not deal with various PR education-oriented faculty and curricular issues is not an option; they are not going to go away.

On the faculty side, we also can expect current trends to continue. Pressure on faculties to hire only professors with doctorates is not going to change, and is likely to continue intensifying. The number of persons with Ph.D.s in public relations or general mass communication, and especially those who also have professional experience in public relations, will not be able to keep up with demands caused by

student enrollments, university credential requirements, and faculty and student strong preference for, if not expectations of, professional experience. The resulting gap in journalism/mass communication departments/schools could be largely filled, as it is now, with persons with master's degrees (and sometimes only bachelor's degrees) who have extensive professional PR experience. But to the extent that the gap will be filled by persons with Ph.D.s, it probably will be filled by those with Ph.D.s in speech/rhetoric (and probably little to no professional experience in PR) because Americans with Ph.D.s in marketing or other areas of business and management can make more money teaching in business schools than they can teaching in either journalism/mass communication departments/schools or speech/rhetoric departments, and obviously not because their doctorates are in another discipline. And these professors with Ph.D.s in speech/rhetoric likely will only reinforce attempts to ground public relations education in speech/rhetoric rather than allow to move, let alone push it, toward more of a business/management orientation.

In short, the probability that the only way universities that are demanding or preferring to hire persons with Ph.D.s can find enough Ph.D.s to teach PR students is to hire more persons with speech/rhetoric Ph.D.s does not bode well for the future of PR teaching, research or practice when they need to move toward a business/economics orientation. Observers of PR will increasingly recognize, as "The Professional Bond" authors and I and others do, where PR education needs to go but not see a way to get it there.

It is likely, too, that U.S. PR education will continue to be entrepreneurial, some would say opportunistic. For example, U.S. speech/rhetoric professors have

moved decisively into teaching and conducting research on health communication, political communication, and science communication because these subdisciplines, which sound professionally oriented regardless of whether they have any connection to real jobs, were saleable to both potential students and also for grants and contracts from government agencies, corporations, foundations, and others. As we have seen, the latest trend or fad in PR education is sports marketing and management, sometimes connected to sports journalism courses and sometimes not. While highly popular with students, and increasingly researched and taught by professors who either became professors largely to teach sports marketing and management, or professors who previously taught in other areas but could finally link their work with their leisure, sports marketing/management is relatively new as a communication research area and again rather futile as career preparation. This is not because there are essentially no jobs in sports marketing/ management like there is no such job as “health communicator” or “political communicator,” but rather because there are so few jobs compared with how many students are majoring in sports marketing/ management. For example, the USA has only 32 National Football League teams, only 32 Major League Baseball teams, and only 30 National Basketball Association teams—only 94 teams before one gets to hockey and soccer. In the realm of “political communicators,” even the U.S. Senate needs 100 press secretaries and the U.S. House of Representatives 435 more, which—in the overall scheme of things—is not very many jobs.

Another fad or trend has been crisis communication. Crisis communication in the United States has a corpus of prominent, nearly archetypal, case studies: the Ex-

xon Valdez oil tanker spill in Alaska; cyanide in the pain reliever Tylenol; Ford trucks and their Firestone tires; Union Carbide & the Bhopal disaster; and various airlines being grounded and various products (especially automobiles) being involved in massive recalls. The BP oil spill in Gulf of Mexico, with a spotlight on the company's chairman, will no doubt become another. Crisis communication is not an area in which professors can obtain very many grants and contracts, but for faculty and students alike, crisis communication strikes them as relevant and important. Unfortunately, it also strikes them as intellectually challenging, exciting, and even glamorous to the extent that crisis communications as an academic subdiscipline is no longer kept in realistic professional perspective: when one considers the litany of crisis communication cases to teach courses about and write research articles about, it should quickly become obvious (although it usually doesn't) that the typical U.S. public relations practitioner will go through his/her entire career without having to deal with a crisis anywhere near these proportions.

### **Can The Likely Path be Altered?**

Several developments would have to occur for the current trajectory of U.S. public relations education and research to be altered. The first would be if U.S. employers began more consistently and more uniformly required entry-level PR practitioners to already have a solid business administration/management education at the undergraduate level. The change cannot come merely from students, as student demands that result in major changes in faculty and/or curriculum occur only when they align with the interests of faculty and/or universities (such as their finances) overall. And business school professors are not likely to be proactive about public

relations education; they are not going to move themselves out of business schools, and they generally do not need to broaden business education to include PR unless PR education already has long been in their business school. Business schools generally have as many or more students than they can handle, and therefore business schools do not need to be imperialistic about public relations to shore up any sagging student enrollment.

Second, public relations professors who are at ACEJMC-accredited journalism/ mass communication programs and who believe that PR education needs to become more business oriented, especially at the expense of humanities (read: speech/rhetoric) and even social scientific orientations, need to forego ACEJMC accreditation for PR programs even while other majors in the their academic units receive such accreditation. That and/or push for ACEJMC not to use the same 40-credit major/80-credit liberal arts/ sciences model on public relations (and advertising?) majors even while ACEJMC continues to use old model on journalism. (A third path would be to institutionally strengthen the PRSA accreditation process in addition to, or instead of, the ACEJMC accreditation process, for PR education, while making sure that the PRSA standards are high and also properly aligned toward more of a business/management orientation and less of a speech/rhetoric one.)

Third, public relations professors at JMC programs that are not ACEJMC accredited should take advantage of their greater flexibility to offer a curriculum, on their own or in conjunction with their institutions' business schools, that is increasingly closer to The Professional Bond's recommendations.

Fourth, JMC professors can take it upon themselves to obtain more advanced



training in management, marketing, finance, accounting, economics, etc., and not wait for this knowledge to be added into the faculty through new full-time PR professors, more highly qualified adjunct instructors, closer working relationships with business schools, etc.

I regret that I cannot be optimistic about any of this, at least not in the short term.

NOTE: a few paragraphs of this paper appeared in slightly different form in Dr. Dane S. Claussen's Editor's Note column, "On the Business and Economics Education of Public Relations Students" (*Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, Autumn 2008).