

**Out on a Long Limb:
An Examination of Public Relations Education
and its Support from the Practice**

Donald K. Wright, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication
University of South Alabama
1000 University Commons
Mobile, AL 36688-0002
Tel: 251-380-0850
Fax: 251-380-0510
DonaldKWright@aol.com

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Introduction and Overview

More than 30 years ago, during a meeting of the Public Relations Division of the then Association for Education in Journalism, Cutlip and Bateman (1973), criticized "the unsatisfactory and disparate state of public relations education in US colleges and universities." These co-authors, arguably one the leading public relations academicians of all time and one of the most nationally recognizable practitioners of that era, wrote the following paragraphs.

The need for qualified, competent, professional assistance in this field was never greater than it is today. Yet the heavy hand of the past – its publicity genesis – still dominates public relations practice today when our divided society cries out for communication, conciliation and community. Call it "public relations," "public affairs," "corporate communications," or whatever you will, the need for trained persons in this area is likely to increase in coming decades, as our society becomes even more complex.

Yet, we have already witnessed and are witnessing today a dearth of professional public relations practitioners capable of operating at the higher executive levels in all institutions – public and private – where their counsel is needed. The number of qualified people in public relations is incapable of meeting the demand for competent practitioners. Generally speaking, most of those in public relations work today were not specifically educated for this type of career. They are "retreads" from other fields of communication.

In the last quarter-century, more and more institutions of higher learning have turned their attention to public relations as a field of study. To a very considerable extent, courses in public relations are offered on an elective basis at the undergraduate level. Many of the courses, however, are taught by instructors who themselves are not fully qualified in the theory and practice of public relations (Cutlip & Bateman, 1973, pp. 1-2).

Ironically, three decades later, much remains unchanged. The need for qualified public relations practitioners is greater than ever; much of public relations education and practice continues to focus more on outputs than outcomes; our field continues to be called by a variety of different names – rarely public relations; counsel of qualified public relations experts is needed at the executive level in all sorts of organizations; most who work in public relations were not specifically educated in our field; more and more colleges and universities are teaching public relations; and, not all who do this teaching are fully qualified.

For several centuries, scholars have said that a major characteristic distinguishing a profession from an occupation was the intellectual base of the former. For nearly half a century, global evidence has existed suggesting that effective public relations practice requires knowledge, skill and intellect. Public relations education is based on a solid body knowledge that continues to develop and expand. Whatever the reasons, however, the support for public relations education is woefully bad, at best. Some say it's even deplorable. Although there are a few isolated exceptions where public relations education and research receives appropriate support, and there are several hundred practitioners who are great friends and supporters of public relations education and research, the reality is most public relations practitioners couldn't care less about public relations education and research. Furthermore, only a small percentage of universities even teach public relations, and many of them neither teach it properly nor hire faculty not qualified either to conduct cutting-edge research in the field or to teach about current, cutting-edge strategic public relations problems.

This paper contends that public relations education and research never will attain an equal status with other academic professional disciplines, and, in turn, with other professions or occupations, until it is properly positioned within university structures and appropriately supported by the majority of those who work in the field of public relations. Data used to support these arguments were collected through a variety of personal and telephone interviews with public relations scholars and practitioners, and through a web-based survey of public relations educators. The paper offers a number of specific suggestions that could improve public relations education and enhance the support it receives both on and off campus.

Background

Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) report the number of public relations practitioners in the US grew from 162,000 in 1990 to 197,000 in 2000. When *U.S. News & World Report* (1997) included public relations in its list of "best jobs" seven years ago the magazine predicted the number of public relations jobs in the nation could grow by 55 percent by 2006. If one accepts these figures and predictions, there are more than a quarter of a million public relations practitioners in the US today. Johnson and Ross (2000) say 145 US universities offered public relations degree programs in 1999, and Becker (2002), who conducts annual studies on the size of journalism and mass communication enrollments in the nation, claims there were 12,400 undergraduates majoring in public relations at US universities in 2000.

In spite of these large numbers, neither a course or two in public relations nor a public relations degree is anything but a prerequisite for employment in public relations. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) report that approximately 40 percent of those now working in public relations majored in journalism, and they say news-editorial university graduates outnumber public relations graduates two to one. David Ferguson (1987), the former chief public relations officer for US Steel and a huge supporter of public relations education, once said, "Public relations will never reach the status of a profession as long as people can get into the field and prosper without having completed a fairly rigorous course of study in the field."

Dialogue and discussion about public relations education has taken place over the years through a number of "commissions" sponsored and cosponsored by

professional associations such as the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Arthur W. Page Society and the National Communication Association (NCA). The first of these, a Commission on Public Relations Education, was formed in 1973 by the Association for Education in Journalism (later to be known as AEJMC), and issued a report in 1975, "A Design for Public Relations Education" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1975). Among other recommendations, this report suggested curricula for undergraduate and graduate study in public relations. Most of these recommendations are now required for accreditation by the Accrediting Council on Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) as well as for certification by PRSA.

As public relations education rapidly grew and expanded during the 1970s and 1980s, two other educational commissions were created to update and review changes in public relations education and its curriculum. These included the Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations, established by the Public Relations Division of AEJMC in 1982, and the Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations, cosponsored by the Public Relations Division of AEJMC and the Educators Section of PRSA in 1983. Both of these groups issued lengthy reports. The graduate commission's report provided detailed suggestions for graduate study in public relations" (Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations, 1985), and the undergraduate commission's report recommended updating the 1975 curriculum suggestions " (Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education, 1987).

Ehling (1992) thoroughly reviewed the work of all three of these commissions. He pointed out the first group was responsible for strengthening and standardizing undergraduate and graduate education in public relations and made good strides in developing a dialogue between educators and practitioners. This early commission recommended a curriculum consisting of course work in three main areas – liberal arts, communication studies and public relations studies. When the commission on graduate studies was convened, Ehling (1992) says more than 50 US universities were offering graduate degree programs in public relations, and he summarizes the major goals of this graduate commission as being designing a model graduate-level curriculum and making sure this curriculum met the needs of the public relations practice. The graduate commission's report was somewhat parallel with that of the first commission except that it focused upon graduate study. As this report discussed what it called, "the drive toward professionalism through new emphasis on graduate study in public relations," it said, "practitioners and educators must act in concert to guide public relations in the direction of professionalism. Without this necessary partnership, the practice of public relations will never attain the professional status it needs and deserves to perform the communication and management tasks it has been assigned in the United States." (Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations, 1985. p. 5).

The Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education was formed in 1987 by the Public Relations Division of AEJMC in co-sponsorship with 24 other organizations including the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and the National Communication Association (NCA). This group's report, (Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education, 1987), continued to echo the need for an undergraduate degree consisting of at least half of liberal arts courses with about

one-quarter of the degree in professional courses including the so-called "five-course requirement" of identifiable public relations courses in public relations principles and theory, communication principles as applicable to public relations activity, strategic planning and evaluative research, management principles involving goal setting and program implementation, and a supervised internship program.

As these last two commissions were wrapping up their activities, several other groups surfaced that would impact the future of public relations education and scholarship. These included the Task Force on Demonstrating Professionalism and the Body of Knowledge Task Force, both created by PRSA in 1986 (Ehling, 1992), and an Assessment Task team that resulted in several recommendations and reports by NCA in 1998 (Coombs & Rybacki, 1999). NCA also held a Summer Conference on Public Relations Education.

Another major public relations education commission, the Commission on Public Relations Education, was created in 1999 and remains active today. This group was comprised of 47 educators and practitioners and has been effectively managed by PRSA in close co-sponsorship with AEJMC, IPR, NCA, IABC, IPRA, the International Communication Association (ICA), and the Association for Women in Communication. This group's initial report, by far the most thorough of the various commission reports, elaborated thoroughly on components for baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degree programs in public relations and also made recommendations about teaching methods and faculty qualifications (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1975). Unlike previous commission reports, this one also made recommendations regarding continuing education for practitioners and workloads for public relations faculty at colleges and universities. It also raised appropriate questions about accreditation and certification programs offered for public relations education by ACEJMC and PRSA, and briefly touched upon resources universities needed to provide for public relations degree programs.

Recommendations of this 1999 report included encouraging the following:

- Having public relations practitioners "take a new look at the 'products' of today's public relations education" (p. 35).
- Getting more practitioners to become involved in accreditation and certification programs of public relations education.
- The creation of "additional endowed chairs in public relations at academic institutions with outstanding public relations programs" (p. 35).
- Having individual public relations professionals, "especially those who have benefited handsomely from public relations practice" (p. 35), to make significant financial contributions to public relations education.
- Getting both practitioners and educators to develop and participate in "projects of topical and long-term social significance."
- The development of joint research projects, administered by educators and funded by the practice.

- Creating ways to enhance the funding of and financial support for public relations education (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2001, pp. 35-36).

The Struggle to Improve PR Education

As Judy VanSlyke and I have pointed out on several occasions (Wright & VanSlyke Turk, 2003), public relations education has both flourished and struggled since Edward L. Bernays taught the first course in public relations at New York University in 1923 (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p. 124). In spite of the growth in formal education in public relations -- growth both in terms of numbers of programs and numbers of students -- there still remains a lack of consensus about how, or even whether, public relations should be taught at US universities. Some of the greatest discrepancies facing public relations education continue to be lack of support, encouragement and understanding from those who practice the profession.

Whatever the reasons, the support for public relations education and research is woefully bad, at best. Some say it's even deplorable. Most US universities don't even teach public relations much less conduct research in it, and many schools that teach public relations neither teach it properly nor hire faculty qualified to conduct cutting edge research in our field. Until public relations education and research is properly positioned within university structures it will never achieve the respect needed to put us on a par with other academic disciplines, and in turn, with other professions or occupations.

A considerable amount of the next few pages consists of information we previously authored for the aforementioned reports. In an academic paper of this nature, the normal procedure would be merely to cite the previous works and direct readers to them. Unfortunately, however, these materials are not as readily available as traditional books or journal articles. The earlier version consists of a spiral bound volume of chapters with a diminishing number of copies available. It exists in few libraries. The latter version was circulated on a CD-Rom. Although interested parties could purchase this CD from PRSA, the author believes few would do so, and that's why the following information is provided in such great detail.

Philosophical Differences

A number of major philosophical differences continue to exist today among public relations educators and between educators and practitioners. These include:

- What constitutes an appropriate public relations curriculum;
- Whether public relations is more appropriately taught at the undergraduate or graduate level;
- What academic unit or combination thereof (business, communication, journalism and/or mass communication) most appropriately serves as the best academic "home" for public relations;
- What qualifications are necessary for those who teach public relations at universities in the United States.

These philosophical differences sometimes have divided public relations educators and to pitted educator against practitioner. Everyone, it seems, is an "expert" on public relations education, largely because public relations education is grappling with the same central concern that dominates the practice of public relations: is, or isn't, public relations education a profession, a unique calling characterized by a body of knowledge, a prescribed means of training and preparation for entry, and a code of ethical conduct adhered to by all those who call themselves public relations educators?

Public relations educators, like those who actually practice public relations, haven't even been able to agree upon a definition of what it is they do and how they're supposed to do it, much less achieve consensus about the parameters of professionalism that should guide their endeavors. Is it any wonder, then, that public relations education – and, indeed the entire public relations practice – faces a lack of credibility and fails to earn support, encouragement and understanding?

Some PR Education Problems are Unending

There is nothing much new about the questions facing undergraduate public relations education in the US today. A review of the literature from two or three decades ago provides ample evidence that many of the problems faced then continue to plague public relations education (Bernays, 1978; Chase, 1961; Mader, 1958 & 1969; Mortimer, 1963; Walker, 1982; and, Westland, 1974). As Doug Newsom, leading public relations educator and past president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), has pointed out, "It is not surprising that a discipline that cannot even agree on its definition is confused about career preparation (Newsom, 1984).

Early in the 1980s we identified the following problems as the major obstacles impeding the progress and continued professional development of public relations education (Wright, 1982):

- Enrollments were increasing faster than employment opportunities for graduates;
- There was a shortage of qualified public relations professors;
- Some practitioners were questioning the abilities of some graduates of public relations programs;
- Some practitioners continued to doubt that public relations education had any value at all;
- Despite its maturation and growth, public relations education still lacked the respect accorded other professional educational programs, such as law, medicine and accounting.

At that time we pointed out that many of those obstacles were not peculiar to public relations education. Certainly other university-based educational programs preparing students for other disciplines were facing many of those same roadblocks along their routes to professional credibility. But while the obstacles facing public

relations education were not uncommon, they were serious concerns for the entire public relations profession twenty years ago.

As we entered the 1990s, we reported that public relations education still faced many of the same obstacles we had identified a decade and more ago. And since other problems also had arisen, we created the following agenda for what we then called the future of public relations education. It addressed this list of problems and concerns:

- Considerable growth in the number of public relations programs that have developed, especially within speech and speech-communications schools or departments.
- A shortage of qualified public relations faculty exacerbated by this mushrooming growth in the number of university-based public relations degree programs.
- Continued enrollment growth in public relations education, with an increase in quantity often accompanied by a decrease in quality. Public relations education should not be the "dumping ground" for students "who like people" and want to study public relations because they flunked out of business, education, law or whatever. There is a need to attract more highly qualified students into university-based public relations degree programs.
- Lack of significant, seminal research by public relations educators, and lack of encouragement for or use of such scholarly research by practitioners.
- Dogmatic lists of "musts" and "must nots" that public relations practitioners and practitioner-oriented professional societies, such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), seek to impose upon public relations curricula.
- The possible need to change the focus of public relations education away from the traditional skill-based focus of preparing graduates for entry-level jobs as communication technicians to a focus that would prepare graduates for positions that combine hands-on communication skills with administration and management and problem-solving duties.
- Frustration on the part of public relations educators over the continued insistence by some public relations practitioners to have public relations taught in university schools and colleges of business, management and commerce, despite the reality that most business faculty know little about public relations, and the few who do often hold a considerable amount of negative prejudice toward the field.
- Lack of administrative support for the public relations function within universities. Public relations education often lacks the support of department chairs, deans, academic vice presidents and provosts, regardless of the academic unit public relations calls home (business, communication, journalism and/or mass communication, or speech-communication).

- Continued resistance by many of the nation's large research universities to offering public relations curricula, resulting in continued concentration of public relations education -- even the best public relations education -- at smaller, regional comprehensive universities.
- Lack of significant involvement by public relations education and/or educators in continuing education and professional development education for practitioners.

Having identified the major issues and obstacles currently faced by public relations education, we can examine these in some detail.

Curriculum Issues

The suggestion that the focus of public relations curricula should be changed or modified from technical to managerial is relatively new, spawned by a significant body of research into public relations practitioner roles (VanSlyke Turk, 1989 & Wakefield & Cottone, 1986). The central focus of many undergraduate programs, especially those housed within journalism/mass communication programs, continues to be the teaching of practical communication skills: writing, editing, graphics, photography, broadcast production, desktop publishing. Both practitioners and educators – at least those educators from journalism/mass communication backgrounds or traditions – agree that the teaching of those skills is important.

The question is whether or not those skills still are of paramount importance, when every indication is that the public relations career track involves a progression from entry-level skills jobs to higher-level managerial positions? Many educators and professionals argue that public relations programs increasingly have an obligation to prepare students not just for their first entry-level jobs, but for their lifetime careers, and therefore public relations curricula must increasingly include attention to administrative and managerial topics: strategic planning, problem-solving, communication facilitating, budgeting and the like.

Even though they agree that public relations curricula should be broadened to include these managerial concerns, educators are, in many cases, hard-pressed to squeeze additional management-oriented public relations courses into an already overfull program of study. Most academic units limit the number of courses students can take in their major in order to encourage a broad, liberal education in the arts and sciences alongside professional preparation. Programs accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) must adhere to strict guidelines limiting courses in the major to about 25 percent of a student's program. If more management perspectives and skills are to be taught, these might occur at the expense of the communication skills courses that are most needed by public relations students when they enter the job market. Walker (1981) reported that many graduate public degree programs in public relations teach very few public relations courses, and frequently are filled with instruction from other areas and/or departments including journalism, mass communication, advertising, marketing, political science and public administration.

Another major curriculum issue surrounds the differences between courses and study designed to teach about public relations "outputs," and those focused

upon public relations "outcomes." Outputs deal with the technical skill sets necessary for effective public relations practice and include areas such as writing, editing, graphic creativity, etc. Outcomes concern themselves with whether or not the outputs were effective in helping to change attitudes, opinions and behavior. A press release promoting a musical concert might be an output, and the outcome might be whether or not this release was effective in interesting people to attend the event.

Although public relations education has taken great strides to incorporate theory and research into the curriculum, one problem at many universities is the reality some public relations faculty members neither stay abreast of current developments in the field nor require their students to do so. Unfortunately, some faculty members do not require their students to regularly read publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the nation's business press or the public relations trade press. These faculty members wait for current-day cases to be incorporated into textbooks and this often takes years.

Sriramesh (2002) has addressed the unfortunate reality that there is such an American bias to public relations research and education. He points out public relations education, "has not kept pace with the rapid globalisation (sic) that has occurred since 1992" (p. 54). He says it is time for public relations educators to integrate international experiences into the public relations body of knowledge and into public relations curricula. Taylor (2001) advocates the addition of a public relations course that incorporates topics related to culture, international practices and culturally sensitive theory.

PR's Academic Home

Much of the growth in public relations education during the past four decades has been confined to undergraduate or baccalaureate degree programs. Perhaps the most significant issue in terms of recent growth and development in public relations education concerns the large number of newer public relations degree programs or sequences that have been established within the confines of speech or speech-communication departments, rather than within journalism/mass communication programs, which have been the more traditional academic home bases to university-based education in public relations.

It should be mentioned here that the semantics of higher education are confusing and the word "communications" has many meanings, especially when used to identify a department, school or college. At some universities the "communication department" is a new name for the old speech department that teaches courses in public address, rhetoric, interpersonal communication and so forth. Historically many of these departments changed names from "speech" and are known as "communication" departments, even though they're really speech-communication departments.

At other universities, the "communication" department/ school/college involves a combination of disciplines that sometimes, but not always, includes advertising, broadcasting, journalism, public relations and speech-communication. For operational purposes in this article, we will consider "communication" units to involve this combination of the disciplines that grew out of speech (or speech-communication) with the academic areas that grew out of journalism (or journalism/mass communication). A speech-communication unit, for this study's

purposes, would be a department that teaches those disciplines that grew out of speech and that also teaches public relations, but does not offer a full complement of sequence offerings in other areas of journalism/mass communication.

The teaching of public relations in speech-communication departments has both positive and negative ramifications. Indeed, the two authors of this paper disagree moderately about the advantages and limitations of teaching public relations in a speech-communication venue, rather than in the more traditional journalism/mass communication environment.

While public relations students in speech-communication departments usually receive a better grounding in conceptual and theoretical constructs and critical-thinking skills compared to students in journalism/mass communication-based public relations programs, they might be shortchanged when it comes to learning the communication skills and techniques such as writing, editing, graphic design and layout, that are so essential to public relations practice. And, despite perceived advantages about teaching public relations students to be managers, expert-prescribers and critical-thinking problem-solvers, the reality is that most practitioners start their careers as technicians and often are hired on the basis of their technical skills.

A possible advantage to basing public relations education in speech-communication, however, is the higher value placed upon research and scholarship among most speech-communication-based public relations faculty than by most public relations educators in journalism/mass communication programs. A great deal of the seminal research on public relations today originates with professors who teach public relations in speech-communication departments. Public relations educators in the journalism/mass communication tradition are more likely to engage in descriptive or how-to scholarship.

Most of the public relations sequences in speech-communication departments developed at two types of universities: first, the institutions where hard-line, Neanderthal-like, print-media-oriented journalism faculties did not want to develop public relations programs or sequences, and second, the universities that did not teach journalism. In the former case, many of these speech-communication units also began teaching courses in radio for the same reasons and developed them into radio-TV programs. In the latter case, some speech departments developed into total communication units, teaching a full complement of courses in speech, rhetoric, interpersonal communication, group communication, public relations, mass communication, journalism, advertising and related areas. However, some of these speech-communication departments continue to teach public relations at campuses where no journalism or mass communication skills courses are offered at all.

In addition to journalism, communication, mass communication and speech-communication units, some public relations is taught in business schools. Public relations courses in business schools have grown out of what once were known as "business communication" classes which, essentially, taught business majors how to write. Some business school faculty who used to teach undergraduate and MBA students writing and other communication skills recently have branched into the teaching of "management communication" courses which are extremely similar to public relations management and case-study courses within traditional aspects of public relations education. Much of the teaching of public relations in business schools is the result of strong encouragement from professional associations –

especially the Arthur W. Page Society – to teach about public relations in business schools so future CEOs, CFOs, etc., will gain an appreciation and understanding about public relations. Ironically, few business schools use the term “public relations” to describe these courses, preferring instead to call what they do “corporate communication.”

Are There too Many Professional Associations for PR Educators?

Public relations education still lacks its own professional society or association. In the early years, most public relations education was housed in journalism and/or mass communication academic units and, as such, faculty generally attended the annual conference of AEJMC where the Public Relations Division has thrived for decades. As public relations education branched out into speech-communication programs a public relations section was established within NCA. Most of those who now teach public relations (or corporate communications) in business schools are affiliated with the business school academic associations. Some public relations faculty members from all three of these different academic units are members of the International Communication Association (ICA). In addition to these academic-based professional groups, public relations educators also participate in educator-related programming within PRSA, IABC, IPRA, and other professional societies. Kruckeberg (1998) has addressed the reality that so many professional societies and organizations compete for the interest of public relations educators.

The author of this paper once figured out he could find professional and intellectual justification for membership in more than a dozen academic and professional associations and societies. Few, if any, universities would pay for memberships in that many groups much less support travel to that many different conferences. In fact, the majority of public relations educators in the US pay their professional dues out of their own pockets, and university-supported travel funds for public relations educators are a huge embarrassment. It is not uncommon for public relations educators to have annual travel budgets of less than \$1,000.

In light of these and other reasons, the professional society affiliations of public relations educators are divided amongst many different organizations. In an attempt to try and bring public relations educators together in their own annual conference, the Institute for Public Relations, in conjunction with a number of cosponsoring organizations, annually helps with the coordination of a public relations research conference. Now in its seventh year, this conference has started playing a major role in the development of public relations education and research. It also has done a terrific job facilitating dialogue between educators and senior-level public relations practitioners, many of whom attend this conference. For the past four years this conference has been hosted by the University of Miami and held in South Miami, Florida.

The Difficulty of Hiring Qualified PR Faculty

In almost any given academic year, more than 25 college or university programs search for public relations faculty. Discussions with administrators of those academic units seeking public relations faculty indicate that as many as half of those positions go unfilled, sometimes for several years, because of a lack of applicants or a shortage of qualified applicants.

It's a situation not only of supply and demand, but also a situation of changing, and rising, faculty expectations. It is extremely difficult for universities to find people with the desirable and necessary combination of academic and professional credentials willing to teach public relations, especially given the relatively low salaries paid to full-time college and university faculty. It's a fact of life that at most colleges and universities today, the name of the success game is earning tenure and promotion, and that requires research and publication, as well as good classroom teaching, to earn those rewards. The public relations faculty member most likely to succeed in this system of rewards is one who has both the academic credentials the academy expects (a Ph.D. degree) and the professional credentials (a minimum of five years of full-time, professional experience) demanded by the reality that public relations education is professional (or at least quasi-professional) education. Because there are few such "ideal" faculty candidates for most public relations faculty positions, administrators often compromise when hiring public relations faculty. Either the academic credentials or the professional experience is likely to fall by the wayside given the realities of faculty supply and demand. And many positions are not filled for years on end, resulting in faculty from other disciplines (print journalism, rhetoric, interpersonal communication) teaching public relations courses with neither academic nor professional credentials in public relations.

Public relations education doesn't "grow its own" professors the way programs in speech communication or journalism do. There's a noticeable lack of doctoral programs with concentrations in public relations. In addition, doctoral students in related fields, such as speech-communication or journalism/mass communication, who might be interested in preparing for teaching careers in public relations, often are thwarted in their desire to focus their doctoral studies on public relations because of a shortage of qualified public relations faculty on their campuses to direct the Ph.D. studies.

Large numbers of students who seek to major in public relations, particularly at the undergraduate level, continue to be both a blessing and a curse: a blessing in that large numbers of students make the programs popular (or at least demanding of notice and attention) among university administrators, but a curse in the face of the reality that there often aren't enough public relations faculty to do an effective job of preparing students -- and that there often aren't enough jobs for even those students who are properly prepared!

PR Scholarship and Research

When compared to their colleagues in other areas of speech-communication and journalism/mass communication, most public relations educators aren't prolific scholars and researchers. Certainly, the large teaching loads, and heavier than average service expectations, contribute to a lack of research. However, an even more compelling explanation for the lack of research productivity is the reality that many of these people are ill-equipped to be scholars or researchers of public relations. Their academic preparation probably is not even in public relations, and many sadly lack the conceptual, theoretical and methodological prerequisites necessary before exploring and investigating questions of significance to public relations. Their professional preparation, if they have any, isn't likely to have

prepared them for research, since study after study has documented the paucity of research (formulative or evaluative) used in the practice of public relations.

Those who do engage in research find few scholarly or professional journals in public relations that are willing or able to publish the results of their scholarship, and most speech-communication or journalism/mass communication journals seem to look with disdain on publishing public relations research, preferring instead research more in the "mainstream" of their particular disciplines.

And there's precious little financial support for public relations research. Few colleges and universities provide more in the way of support than perhaps a bit of time off from teaching and a part-time graduate assistant. Few foundations, government or private, fund public relations research, and practitioners and practitioner organizations do no better.

Lack of Respect for PR Education from Practitioners

Although there are a number of noted exceptions, the reality is most public relations practitioners do not respect public relations education.

Before proceeding further on this topic, let's make it exceptionally clear that public relations education has benefited greatly from the support it has received over the past half century from several hundred practitioners. A partial list of the names of these people would include J. Carroll Bateman, Betsy Plank, David Ferguson, Paul Alvarez, Allen Center, Ron Rhody, Frank Wylie, Bill Adams, John Paluszek, John Beardsley, Sue Bohle, Joan Capelin, Jerry Dalton, Bill Corbett, Jack Felton, Stan Hudson, Carole Howard, Wilma Matthews, Jay Rockey, Patrick Jackson, Isobel Parke, Judith Phair, Nancy Wolfe, Grant Horne, Harold Burson, Chester Burger, Ed Block, Larry Foster, Bill Nielsen, David Drobis, Dan Edelman, Dick Mau, Jack Koten, Ward White, Peter Debreceeny, Frank Ovatt, Ron Culp, Matt Gonring, Bruce Harrison, Maril MacDonald, Anne McCarthy, Lou Williams, Chris Komisarjevsky, John Budd, Jack Bergen, Roger Bolton, Jim Murphy, Bill Margaritis, Elliot Schreiber, Steve Harris, Ann Barkelew, Jim Arnold, John Graham, Joe Epley, Katly Lewton and Dwayne Summer. If you keep adding names to this list eventually it includes several hundred people.

Although this is impressive, the reality is that's far less than one percent of those practicing public relations in the US today. While public relations educators are greatly appreciative of the support they have received from these and other individuals, the reality of the situation is a larger number of public relations practitioners frequently have been critical of public relations education.

Certainly, some of this practitioner criticism probably is justified. There are some university-based public relations programs that truly are terrible. There are some places where the public relations faculty never have published refereed scholarship, and there are institutions who have hired incompetents to teach public relations. Even though these programs are in the minority, public relations educators should face up to these realities and clean up their own back yard.

The Universities Teaching Public Relations

Although public relations sequences or programs exist at nearly 150 American universities, fewer than 15 of these programs are located at institutions where public relations' academic homes -- a speech-communication or journalism/mass communication unit -- offer Ph.D. programs. Only six of these public relations programs are at what higher education considers major research universities. The rest of the programs are at "comprehensive" rather than "research" institutions.

This affects two of the problem areas already discussed: lack of research by public relations educators, and a shortage of faculty with academic credentials (the Ph.D.) in public relations.

While they value and encourage research and scholarship by faculty, comprehensive universities place more emphasis on the teaching leg of the three-legged stool (research, teaching and service) that constitutes an academic career. Faculty at these universities, unlike faculty at major research universities, are expected to be teachers first and researchers second, and are rewarded accordingly.

With few public relations programs located in units that offer doctoral degrees, there is little possibility for public relations to create its own professors. An individual who wants to pursue a terminal degree as preparation for teaching public relations will in most cases have to settle for a doctoral program in some other field.

Although the preceding four paragraphs paint an accurate picture of traditional elements of public relations education, what little public relations (or corporate communication as it's usually called in this case) being taught in US business schools tends to exist at some of the nation's more major research universities. While excellent public relations is taught within journalism and communication units at major research universities such as Boston U., Brigham Young, Florida, Maryland, Miami, Ohio U., Purdue and Syracuse, some of the nation's better programs also exist at institutions such as San Diego State, Ball State, Northern Iowa, San Jose State, Texas Christian, Virginia Commonwealth, and, perhaps, South Alabama. Business schools currently teaching corporate communication components include Dartmouth, Harvard, Notre Dame, UCLA and Virginia.

The Arthur W. Page Society deserves considerable credit for working closely with business schools at these major universities in attempts to encourage their teaching and research about public relations and corporate communications. It is unfortunate that, years ago, a professional association did not come forward and show a similar interest about public relations education programs in journalism and communication units.

Individual PR Faculty Have a Huge Impact

Perhaps more than within any field in academic, excellent public relations degree programs tend to be associated with individual faculty members more than they are connected with universities themselves. In other fields -- medicine, law, business, engineering, agriculture, etc. -- the nation's leading programs appear to stay on top even when noted faculty retire or leave for opportunities elsewhere. Such really isn't the case in public relations. This is true for the medical school at Johns Hopkins, the business school at Harvard, the mathematics department at MIT, and many other academic situations. In public relations education, however, excellence

seems to rest more with individual faculty members than with universities themselves.

For example, three decades ago any list of the top five public relations degree programs in the country would have included Wisconsin, Ohio State and Texas, probably in that order. The reason for that was much more the people teaching public relations at those institutions than it was these universities themselves. Scott Cutlip frequently was known as the "father of public relations education" during the many years he taught at Wisconsin. However, since he left Madison and moved to the University of Georgia, Wisconsin rarely has been considered as having one of the nation's leading public relations degree programs. The same could be said for Ohio State and Walter Seifert as well as for Texas and Alan Scott. Wisconsin briefly stayed on the list of the nation's elite public relations degree programs when Glen Broom was hired to replace Cutlip. However, Broom's stay in Madison was brief and it wasn't long before he went to San Diego State which now is considered to have a much better public relations degree program than Wisconsin.

The University of Maryland is significant in this mix for several reasons. Everyone realizes the public relations faculty at Maryland is anchored by Jim and Lauri Grunig, two of the world's most noted public relations educators, who are about to retire. A major question within public relations education today is whether or not Maryland will provide the resources necessary to hire adequate replacements for them. Ironically, the same universities that frequently have no difficulty paying the coach of one athletic team a salary much higher than the coach of another athletic team are not willing to, for example, pay a public relations faculty member more money than someone who teaches rhetoric or journalism. It will be interesting to see if and how public relations educators and public relations practitioners are able to work together in an attempt to encourage Maryland to replace two of the world's leading public relations educators.

Unless and until excellence in public relations education becomes associated with universities more than with individual faculty members there will be a huge rotating and revolving door as far as excellence in public relations education is concerned.

Lack of Administrative Support

It is a huge understatement to say that public relations education lacks respect from most of the universities that have courses and degree programs in the subject. Public relations education not only fails to get much respect from the administrators who head the academic units in which it is housed, but also doesn't get much respect from other academic units on campus. Few administrators of schools or departments that offer public relations programs understand either the academic or professional value of public relations education. Deans and department heads of speech communication programs too often view public relations sequences, with their large numbers of students, as effective ways to balance low enrollment in areas such as rhetoric and vocal effectiveness. Deans and department heads of journalism and mass communication programs too often look down their noses at public relations education as "good journalism gone to the flacks." Most business school administrators just write public relations off as irrelevant.

Public relations educators haven't done a very good job of educating their academic bosses about public relations, or of demonstrating that public relations curricula and faculty are the equal of the other disciplines represented in their academic unit.

And few public relations educators have been elected or appointed to head the colleges, schools or departments that offer public relations programs. Not many public relations professors want to be administrators, and those who have sought and won administrative posts are heading programs at comprehensive, rather than research, institutions. Public relations educators who apply for administrative positions often face professional prejudice from search committee members. Public relations education today is probably not as well off in this respect as it was 25 years ago when noted public relations educators (Scott M. Cutlip of Georgia and Ray E. Hiebert of Maryland) were deans of journalism/mass communication programs at major research universities.

Survey Results

In connection with this paper presentation, a short e-mail survey was conducted with a purposive sample of 125 public relations educators. Subjects were asked what they thought needed to be done in order for public relations education to be in a position to receive greater support and respect from universities and from public relations practice.

Results revealed a long list of suggestions with at least five mentions for encouraging greater ethics in the field, getting universities and practitioners to provide more financial support, educating others about what public relations is, keeping teaching workloads reasonable to public relations faculty can publish research, and encouraging greater use of research in public relations practice. A number of other comments were received including:

- "Provide financial support for public relations education akin to that enjoyed by journalism, business, law, engineering, medicine, and other professional schools."
- "Do something to provide our colleagues across campus a better understanding about what public relations is and what it does."
- "Help stamp out the huge amount of professional prejudice that exists against public relations education. This kind of prejudice is no longer tolerated in terms of gender, race, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, etc., and it should not be tolerated in terms of professional groups or occupations either."
- "We must get the public relations professional community to support public relations education; otherwise the discrimination against us will continue for another fifty years."
- "Continue to emphasize ethics in public relations and show how public relations, practiced effectively, could have gone a long way towards preventing corruption and corporate scandals that have plagued business within the past few years."

- “We need some kind of public relations campaign for public relations education. Whatever is done should be directed at university audiences and practitioner audiences.”
- “We need to do what we can to encourage everyone who practices public relations to tell the truth. We need more openness and honesty, and less spin.”
- “Let’s not blame others until we get our own house in order. There are still too many schools teaching public relations improperly. We need to prevent universities having a dozen or more print media faculty and only one or two public relations faculty when public relations majors outnumber journalism majors three to one. We also must insist on tougher hiring, retention and tenure standards for public relations educators. Let’s also get some OpEd articles in newspapers explaining what public relations is, and more importantly, what it is not.”
- “Provide the opportunity for educators to take sabbaticals to work in industry at respected levels because of their expertise, and the need for professionals to teach as adjuncts. Further, professionals need to get off their opposition kick and start hiring our grads instead of saying things like “I hire more general social science and humanities majors because they write and think better.” Give me a break. Those practitioners are simply operating out of fear and jealousy.”
- “Licensing of the profession would help as would minimal entry requirements into the practice.”
- “Educate journalists and journalism educators about the role public relations plays in society.”
- “Let’s do what we can to get public relations practitioners more trained in the management function of public relations so they can practice public relations as counselors rather than technicians.”
- “We need to get public relations people to use research more. We talk a good game about research but we need to do what we can to make sure research becomes an important component of public relations. We might start with PRSA, IABC, IPRA, etc., and other groups that have awards programs. It would be great if future awards winners were required to have more extensive research in their winning campaigns than often is the case.”
- “I believe a fundamental problem is that PR education has continued [understandably] to focus more heavily on craft and technical education at the expense of developing those more mainstream managerial skills and competences that are needed once practitioners attempt to move up the organizational hierarchy!”
- “What we might need to do is to encourage more senior practitioners to contribute more insights into (1) the management of PR as a business and

perhaps most important (2) to develop and awareness of the arguments about how PR adds value to organizations.”

- “Develop some way to eliminate from public relations those who are not appropriately prepared to practice in the field and who continue to cast the profession in a negative light, especially the field’s ethical principles.”
- “Try and decrease the misuses of the term public relations. Not all communications problems are public relations problems.”
- “Encouraging greater ethical clarity by practitioners and more proactive community involvement.”
- “Support the concept of public relations education and research in writing and speeches. Too often practitioners badmouth public relations education. They say they never hire public relations graduates and prefer people with other degrees. They think that only experience matters. They do not value research as the foundation of any profession.”
- “Give money for endowed chairs in public relations. Universities value the fields most that provide financial support. If professionals truly support public relations education, they and their employers will contribute to its development.”
- “Read and use the research done by academic scholars. A great deal of excellent research is available. I am always shocked when practitioners are totally unfamiliar with it. Repeatedly, I hear practitioners ask questions that academic scholars have had answers to for many years. The best example is research on how to evaluate public relations programs and research that explains the value of public relations to an organization and to society.”
- “It is almost impossible for someone who has been in the classroom for any length of time to stay current. Faculty can provide theory and research to practitioners, but we are too far removed from the front lines of actual practice. Practitioners in the field could help us in many ways, such as:
 - offering part-time/summer jobs to faculty
 - opening their doors and meeting rooms to educator observations.
 - donating current products and materials to be used in the classroom as samples.
 - writing up current cases for classroom use.
 - serving on university curricular and advisory boards.
 - lecturing as a guest speaker.
 - inviting faculty to serve as part of their work teams.
 - sharing ideas on a regular basis.”

Summary and Recommendations

For more than three centuries, scholars have said that a major characteristic distinguishing a profession from an occupation was the intellectual base of the former, and for nearly half a century, global evidence has existed suggesting that

effective public relations practice requires knowledge, skill and intellect. Public relations education is based on a solid body knowledge that continues to develop and expand.

Whatever the reasons, however, the support for public relations education is woefully bad, at best. Some say it's even deplorable. Although there are exceptions where public relations education and research receives appropriate support, the reality is most public relations practitioners couldn't care less about public relations education and research. Furthermore, only a small percentage of universities even teach public relations, and many of them neither teach it properly nor hire faculty qualified to conduct cutting-edge research in the field.

This paper contends that public relations education and research never will attain an equal status with other academic professional disciplines, and, in turn, with other professions or occupations, until it is properly positioned within university structures and appropriately supported by the majority of those who work in the field of public relations.

A study of a purposive sample of public relations educators was conducted. Results revealed a long list of suggestions with at least five mentions for encouraging greater ethics in the field, getting universities and practitioners to provide more financial support, educating others about what public relations is, keeping teaching workloads reasonable to public relations faculty can publish research, and encouraging greater use of research in public relations practice.

Based upon results of this study and the author's work in and interest with public relations education for more than three decades, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Public relations education must receive more administrative support within higher education if it is to flourish and if public relations educators are to become, and be recognized as, professionals. Some of this professional credibility the educators will have to earn for themselves, but in other cases, having a dean or department chair in place who respects the values and standards of public relations education might make the crucial difference.
- Professional groups, especially the Institute for Public Relations, should be called upon to facilitate discussions between the various facets of public relations education – journalism, mass communication, communication, speech-communication, business, etc.
- Public relations education needs to creatively reposition itself in such a way that it will receive greater respect from practitioners and academics. This will include a diligent effort to either improve or abolish weak public relations degree programs, to increase the emphasis upon theory and research in public relations education, and yet also to make certain courses contain references to current-day public relations problems. We no longer can afford to wait until the next edition of a textbook is published before we incorporate current events into our classes.

- Public relations educators and practitioners must insist that ACEJMC accreditation and PRSA certification teams and programs begin looking for inequities that are impacting the effectiveness of public relations education. At a time when ACEJMC has gone to such extremes as to insist that academic units not discriminate (financially or otherwise) against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender aspects of society, it hardly seems inappropriate to suggest these accreditation and certification groups also become the catalysts for the elimination of professional prejudice from these programs.
- PRSA, AEJMC, NCA, and the good number of other cosponsoring associations should be encouraged to continue developing commissions and task forces to examine public relations education. In particular, the current Commission on Public Relations Education should be continued.
- There really need to be more endowed chairs in public relations at US universities. Public relations educators and practitioners plus the various professional and academic associations should be encouraged to work together in attempts to correct this most unfortunate situation.
- Encourage the nation's leading public relations educators and practitioners to attend and support the annual International Public Relations Research Conference, cosponsored by the Institute for Public Relations and the University of Miami. This is the only conference in the world that is organized and operated by public relations educators for public relations educators and practitioners.
- Public relations educators must recognize and appreciate the reality they always will have philosophical differences with practitioners, university administrators and faculty members from other fields of study.
- Stringent steps must be taken to correct the unfortunate reality that too much of the teaching and research about public relations is US-based. Public relations educators need to be cognizant of the global economy and begin plans to incorporate more international teaching into their classes and research.

One wonders while writing a paper such if anyone cares, if anyone will read this, if anyone will take action to help make circumstances better in the future than they are now. The idea for this paper came as the result of news coverage of a speech the author gave in New York recently when he was installed as President of IPRA, the first full-time educator ever to serve in this position. Since he has been speaking out on this topic, a considerable amount of positive feedback has been received. One such note came from a true leader in public relations education and a colleague of the author's on the public relations faculty at the University of Texas nearly 30 years ago. This note, which seems like an appropriate way to end this paper, said: "We've spent too much time patting ourselves on the back. What we need now is a chorus stating it along with you instead of attempting to applaud ourselves on how much we have done. It is time we made it clear where we could be in education and as a profession and where we should be at this point in time in our history. It is also time for us to point out the cost of apathy to our nation, to our profession, and to global peace."

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