

A SURVEY OF EMPLOYER RATINGS OF COURSES OFFERED
AT MAJOR UNIVERSITIES IN ARKANSAS, COLORADO,
KANSAS, MISSOURI, NEW MEXICO, OKLAHOMA, AND
TEXAS IN THE P.R. DEGREE SEQUENCE AND OF
CERTAIN NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Growth of Public Relations Education

It has been said that a profession has come of age when it concerns itself with education for that profession. This statement describes the condition of public relations today.

J.F. Wright introduced the first publicity course at the University of Illinois in 1920. Two years later, Indiana University established its first course in publicity. (1)

The first college course in public relations was appropriately titled "public relations." The course was taught by Edward Bernays at New York University's School of Commerce, Accounts, and Finance in 1923. (2)

Other universities followed. In 1927, the University of Oregon offered a course in publicity. In 1929, the University of Minnesota offered its first public relations course under the title "press relations." (3) In 1945, 21 institutions were offering public relations courses.

In 1985, of the 82,760 students enrolled in departments and schools of journalism, 13 percent were

enrolled in public relations sequences. (4) In 1987, as many as 160 colleges and universities were offering public relations sequences or degree programs. (5) Of the public relations sequences now offered, sixty percent rank first or second in sequence enrollments in journalism schools.

Background and Problem Statement

The field of public relations is constantly changing, moving in new and undetermined directions. This perpetual motion makes it hard for practitioners to define exactly what it is that public relations is and does, much less allow for a comprehensive public relations curriculum for colleges and universities.

"The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education," a report of the 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education co-sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, had this to say on the changing nature of public relations:

A growing, dynamic field, the practice of public relations continues to defy definitions. As it matures, the practice continually flexes its muscles by reaching into new areas, using research and new technologies to renew and improve old patterns, learning more about the art of communications and assessing the compelling and frustrating condition called human behavior. (6)

The problem facing public relations education today is how to develop a public relations sequence which will

better prepare students for a career in public relations. The current trend in public relations education, as well as industry, is toward more of a business communication emphasis and away from a journalism based emphasis.

This trend was noted in the report of the 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education:

The Commission recognizes that the most preferred minor or secondary concentration for public relations students is general business. The Commission's research showed that among educators, practitioners, and students, the business areas given the highest rankings included marketing, management, business economics and finance, in that order. (7)

The problem then, is which areas of knowledge/skill are considered to be most important to public relations employers? What skills do employers expect a public relations graduate to have? What can educators do to better prepare students, and what qualities make students more attractive to the public relations professionals who interview prospective employees? What skills do public relations employers consider to be deficient among graduates?

Purpose of the Study

It seems logical to assume that better prepared graduates will not only have an easier time finding employment, but will also advance more rapidly and will be able to command a higher starting salary. But what skills must the graduate have in order to be highly competitive

in the job market, and what areas of knowledge should educators concentrate on to furnish graduates with these skills?

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the areas of public relations knowledge/skills that public relations employers consider to be most important for an entry-level applicant to have. Also of interest to this study was the importance of a business minor, or specific business courses, to public relations employers.

Another purpose of this study was to determine which extracurricular activities, if any, public relations employers considered to be beneficial for an applicant to have participated in during college.

A vast number of opportunities exist in addition to serving as an internship for course credit. Jobs such as serving as president of a social club or shift manager at a local fast food establishment may highlight a student's management skills. Serving as social coordinator for a campus group may give a student experience in organizing and promoting events. Serving as a writer for the school paper or yearbook may enhance writing and editing skills taught in formal classrooms.

Objectives of the Study

The questions to be answered in this study included which areas of public relations knowledge/skills, which

areas of business knowledge/skills, and what extracurricular activities do public relations employers look for in an entry level employee.

This study was designed to accomplish four objectives:

- 1) To determine what skills public relations professionals deemed necessary for an entry level applicant to have after four years of college.
- 2) To determine the areas of skill/knowledge seen as deficient in public relations graduates, as viewed by the public relations employer.
- 3) To determine how the perceptions of the professional in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas differed from those of educators in the same states.
- 4) To determine which areas of knowledge/skills (journalism and business), as well as extracurricular activities, public relations employers considered to be favorable to gaining employment in the public relations field.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research paper achieved the objectives set forth

earlier by conducting a survey of Public Relations Society of America members in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Economic as well as time factors, limited this study to a representative sample in the region specified. It was felt that such a study would be more relevant for this study's intended readers, namely, undergraduate public relations students in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

While this study was similar to previous research, it differed in one important respect. In addition to asking for employer ratings of public relations skills and business skills, both of which have been studied before, this study asked for employer ratings of extracurricular activities as well. It was assumed that an employer, to some extent, looks for qualities in an employee other than those skills which are taught in the classroom.

Much of the earlier research in public relations education was outdated and in many instances no longer applied to public relations education today. Therefore, most comparisons to other research were drawn from those studies conducted in the mid-to-late-1970s and after.

This study was limited in the following ways: first, this study asked employer ratings for those selected journalism areas of knowledge/skills thought to be the most important based on previous studies. The study was

further limited to asking for employer ratings in only basic business courses.

Second, the study was limited to asking for employer ratings of skills taught in public relations and business as well as ratings on extracurricular activities. The study did not attempt to delve into related areas concerning within which department public relations should be taught, nor did it concern itself with whether a public relations degree should be considered a liberal arts degree or a business degree.

Third, the study did not ask for ratings of future performance based on curriculum, rather the study only asked for ratings when considering graduates for entry-level employment.

Finally, the study dealt only with the responses of Public Relations Society of America members rather than responses from all public relations practitioners in the region.

Contribution of the Study to Mass Communication

This study was an effort to help in the development of specific course areas of knowledge and skills for public relations students and educators. The results of this study should help the public relations educator devise a plan of study which will combat deficiencies in the existing curriculum as seen by the working

professional.

In the ever-changing public relations industry, previous strategies become dated as new and better plans of action arise, technology causes advancement in the field, and prior emphasis shifts from one discipline or ideology to another. It is important to know and understand the philosophy of the key person (public relations employer) in an industry which seems to be constantly changing.

If this study provided an accurate reflection of the wants of the public relations employer, it will offer valuable information for the public relations student, as well as the public relations educator.

The public relations student will have at least a general idea of what awaits him in the working world. The student will have an understanding of what will be expected of him upon graduation, and will have an idea of those attributes which are deemed important by prospective employers. It is hoped that the student will use this research as a gauge with which he can assess his personal qualifications and compare those qualifications with the demands of prospective employers.

The public relations educator should be able to use this study to monitor his own teaching methods and philosophies and compare those of his own with those of the industry. Some may feel the need to re-evaluate and

revise previously held methods/philosophies, others may find that their methods/philosophies mirror those of the industry. Still others may find a way to integrate the findings of this study with their current curriculum.

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter II provides the reader with a historical background of the problem, a review of the current related literature, and establishes the need for such a study.

Chapter III is a description of the research methodology used in gathering data. This chapter discusses the research design used, pilot studies conducted, selection of subjects, research instruments used, data collecting and recording, statistical analysis to be used, methodological assumptions, and limitations of the study.

Chapter IV is an analysis of the data, a reporting of the results and its implications.

Chapter V provides the reader with a summary of the study, conclusions to be drawn from the research, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While many of the earlier studies in public relations education served as a foundation for more recent studies, much of the earlier research in public relations education was not included in this review due to the dynamic, changing nature of the public relations field since such studies were conducted.

Studies such as The Report of the 1975 Commission on Public Relations Education have been revised and updated, reflecting the changes in public relations education and practice. By reviewing only those studies conducted in the mid-to-late-1970s and after, the reader is provided with a more current and comprehensive view of public relations education today.

Current Literature

Literature was reviewed in three areas of public relations education to provide background for this study. The first area reviewed was the existing literature on practitioners' views of public relations education. The second area concentrated on those business areas of

skill/knowledge preferred by public relations practitioners. The third area looked at literature concerning the extra-curricular activities preferred by public relations employers.

What the Professionals Want

In their article titled "What the Professionals Want," Scott and Barker-Benfield (1971) joked:

The ideal student aspiring to a PR career is the student who has majors in public relations and fine arts and business administration and sociology and history and finance and government and shorthand. And he should have spent vacations working as an intern. Presumably he should not be eligible yet for his social security pension. (8)

In another article, "The New Breed of Public Relations Executive," Larry Marshall stated without joke intended:

...other factors are becoming increasingly important, such as effective personal presentation, good managerial ability, business acumen, higher-than-average intelligence, sound judgment, fresh thinking, imagination, creative ideas - and the ability to negotiate and make these ideas happen -high tolerance for frustration, flexibility and resiliency, ...political sensitivity, and a disarming sense of humor." (9)

The American Management Association sponsored a program which listed the skills and knowledge areas needed by a public relations practitioner. Among the skills needed to do a job well were: "writer, media specialist, marketing expert, photographer, financial analyst, protocol officer, recruiter, exhibitor, interviewer,

speech maker, editor and psychologist." (10)

While an undergraduate public relations program cannot provide comprehensive knowledge and skill in all of these areas, it is obvious that practitioners demand a lot from undergraduate public relations education. The question is whether universities are adequately preparing students to meet the needs of practitioners.

The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education

Perhaps the most widely respected study ever conducted on the topic of public relations education was The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education (1987), a study co-sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Recommended Public Relations Courses

The Report of the 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education recommended a curriculum guide for undergraduate public relations education. According to the Commission's recommendations, the core public relations curriculum, consisting of a minimum of one-eighth of the student's total undergraduate education, should include the following areas of skill/knowledge:

(11)

1. Principles, Practices, and Theory of Public Relations: Primary focus is on the

conceptualization and specification of the tasks and responsibilities that define the nature and scope of public relations activity, such as communication theory, interorganizational theory, decision-making and management theory, and conflict-resolution theory.

2. **Public Relations Techniques - Writing, Message Dissemination and Media Networks:** The focus is on skills and techniques needed for writing for public relation, copy dissemination, media use, and media network design. Also to be considered is the range of media used, nature of target audience, the social and organizational context for which writing is intended, and objectives of writing.
3. **Public Relations Research for Planning and Evaluation:** Here the concentration of study is on identifying and segmenting various groups with whom the message is intended, determining the impact of action on target audience, and evaluating the results of actions taken against desired outcomes.
4. **Public Relations Strategy and Implementation:** The intent is to place the student in a managerial, decision-making role, allowing the student to determine what constitutes a public relations program and giving the student full reign over the selection of strategies needed to implement the program.
5. **Supervised Public Relations Experience:** Intent is to allow students to gain practical, hands-on public relations experience by participating in on-site work situations with various public relations departments and organizations.
6. **Specialized Advanced Study:** Intended to give the student the opportunity to become more familiar with the detailed particulars of various levels of operation found within the framework of public relations administration. Areas to be considered include: marketing public relations, public affairs, publicity and media relations, community relations, international relations, financial/shareholder relations, consumer relations, employee relations, fundraising and membership public relations.

Recommended Communications Courses

The subjects which tied for the highest rating by both practitioners and educators was an internship/practicum/work-study program. The Commission also recommended that public relations students give strong consideration to business as a minor or secondary area of study.

In addition to the recommended minimum courses in public relations, the Commission recommended that a minimum of one-eighth of the total undergraduate education be in the area of communications courses. Such a curriculum should include the following areas of skill/knowledge: (12)

1. Technical/Production: Copy preparation and editing; graphic arts and typography; still photography; production for electronic media; public speaking and oral presentation.
2. Historical/Institutional: History of public communications; law and ethics; problems and issues.
3. Communication Process/Structure: Factors affecting the process or structure of communications; impact of the communication process or structure on other factors, i.e., social, psychological.

Public Relations Knowledge/Skills

Required by Employers

A study conducted by Wakefield and Perkins-Cottone (1985), looked at the areas of skill/knowledge that

agency/firm and organizational public relations employers deem important. Among the areas that practitioners felt needed more concentrated effort were interpersonal communication (customer/client relations and decision making/problem solving), skill/knowledge in marketing (project management and coordination of creative efforts), and skill/knowledge in persuasive interpersonal communication (coordination of creative efforts). The top ten areas of skill/knowledge preferred by practitioners included: (13)

1. Customer/client relations
2. Decision making/problem solving
3. Copywriting/proof-solving
4. Writing print advertising copy
5. Writing of news releases
6. Project management
7. Account sales/service
Coordination of creative efforts
8. Graphic design of print advertising
9. Writing
10. Graphic design of collateral pieces

Wakefield and Perkins-Cottone recommended that public relations education programs strengthen the emphasis on interpersonal communication, management, persuasion, advertising, promotional writing, and design courses.

In another study, Cooper (1979) found that when practitioners were asked to select the one course they would advise a public relations major to take while in school, fifty-seven percent indicated a journalism or public relations writing course.

Cooper also found that practitioner's rated course

selections on a five point scale (1=not important, 5=very important) in the following order: (14)

<u>Course</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
Internship	4.48
Graphics	4.40
PR Techniques	4.39
PR Principles	4.39
Media and Campaigns	4.35
PR Case Problems	4.34
Law and Ethics	4.20
Research	3.95

When practitioners were asked to rate the statement, "Skilled writing is the most important quality for an entry-level applicant to have," the mean score was 4.23 on a five point scale (1=not important, 5=very important). This statement received the highest rating and indicates practitioner desire for clear and effective writing skills in entry-level applicants.

In a study by Bobo (1980), practitioners were asked to rank numerically the top three abilities in which Texas public relations graduates were deficient. Practitioners saw organizational skills as the area in which graduates were most deficient. Among the organizational skills deemed deficient were the ability to determine priorities, initiate projects and allocate authority.

Management ability and news release writing were both ranked second. Bobo stated that poor writing was probably the most deficient of all skills indicated. Bobo also cited the practitioner's desire for more business skills as the reason for the deficiency ranking in management

skills. The third area of deficiency listed was attention to detail. Public relations practitioners emphasized the need for meticulous and painstaking accuracy.

Bobo also asked practitioners to rank the top three areas they believe should be included as part of a basic public relations curriculum. The first choice among practitioners was newswriting, indicating a fundamental orientation toward writing skills in public relations. The second choice was marketing and the third was management, indicating a need for business skills in public relations practice.

In another study conducted by Fitzpatrick (1982), practitioners were asked to rate the importance of undergraduate public relations/communications courses on a four point scale (1=very important, 4=not important). The top ten courses rated by practitioners were as follows:

(15)

<u>Course</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
News Writing	1.333
Public Relations Principles	1.614
Practical Application of	
Public Relations Techniques	1.637
Feature/Magazine Writing	1.713
Editing and Layout	1.725
Public Speaking	1.766
Personal Communication	1.819
Public Relations Internship	1.836
Public Relations Case Studies	1.854
Public Relations Theory	1.918

In a study by O'Brien and Shelly (1983), professionals in both Public Relations Society of America

and the International Association of Business Communicators were asked to rate the thirteen top classes for a public relations degree sequence. The ratings for the top thirteen courses in public relations were: (16)

<u>Course</u>	<u>Mean Rankings</u> <u>as a %</u>
Basic News Writing	89
Intro. to Public Relations	85
Advanced Public Relations	61
Intro. to Mass Communications	59
Basic Marketing	59
Copy Editing	57
Publication Production	56
Basic Graphic Arts	55
Business Organization and Management	54
Photography/Photojournalism	52
Communication Research	52
Specialized Press Writing	51
Advanced News Writing	50

Business Areas of Knowledge/Skill

Preferred by Employers

Increasingly, public relations practitioners are sending signals indicating the need for at least a general understanding of how a business operates. Public relations today entails much more than just writing news releases. In the future, if not already, practitioners will require a strong sense of business knowledge from undergraduate public relations majors. This trend was also noted in a 1979 Business Week article which stated:

Public relations men are striving to give an intellectual substance to what they do. They are moving away from the seat-of-the-pants approach... and they are trying to adopt long-range planning and

other apparatus of modern management... Says Otto Lerbinger of Boston University: 'We now have a management-by-objectives mentality. MBO demands are being made of PR practitioners the same as with other top staff and line officers. CEOs used to be satisfied with press clippings.' Now they're saying, 'How is this helping?' (17)

In the same article, Kerry King, senior vice-president of public affairs at Texaco, and past Public Relations Society of America president said:

Many people still equate the (public relations) field with media relations, product publicity, and promotion. Public relations goes beyond that. The problem is that there are not enough public relations men with the skills to deal with their peer groups on the executive and management levels. If you can't talk the language of the peer group, you're not accepted by the management. (18)

The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations

Education also noted this trend toward more of a business orientation in its 1987 report. The Commission stated:

Where the opportunities for a minor exist, it is recommended that students, especially those planning to enter the corporate or agency world, give strong consideration to business as a secondary concentration or minor. (19)

When asked to rank the importance of a minor or secondary field of concentration, participants of the 1987 Commission listed business as the most preferred. The most preferred minors or secondary areas of concentration for undergraduates in the public relations degree sequence were: (20)

1. Business
2. English
3. Social Science
4. Psychology
5. Speech

6. Political Science
7. Computer Science

The Commission also asked participants to rank the relative values of key business courses for public relations majors. The courses most preferred were: (21)

1. Marketing
2. Management
3. Business Economics
4. Finance
5. Computer Science
6. Business Law
7. Statistics
8. Accounting
9. Production

In a study by Kalupa and Allen (1980), practitioners and educators were surveyed on the future direction of public relations education. Of the respondents questioned, almost 95 percent (94.8%) agreed with the statement "Public relations students should be required to take more business courses in the 1980's than most take currently." (22)

In a University of Oklahoma (1980) study of key public relations staff members from 20 "Fortune 500" corporations, 70 percent of the practitioners agreed that an understanding of business subjects was nearly as important as writing and speaking skills. King had this to say concerning the importance of business knowledge to the public relations major:

While training of the journalist is basic to the preparation of a person to enter the public relations field, it is the acquisition of additional skills having to do with economics, marketing, sociology, psychology, and the social

sciences that prepare the public relations practitioner for the job of interpreting the public to management and conversely, management to the public. (23)

In her study, Fitzpatrick found that of the five business courses recommended by practitioners, marketing was ranked as the most important. The rankings of business courses on a four point scale (1=very important, 4=not important) were as follows: (24)

<u>Course</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
Marketing	1.719
Management	1.737
Business Administration	1.749
Economics	1.988
Finance and Accounting	2.094

In his study of Texas public relations professionals, Bobo found that respondents favored business as the top choice for a minor or second degree, further supporting the 1987 Commission's recommendation of a minor in business. The top five subject areas which would be of greatest benefit as an accompanying minor or second major to a public relations degree were: (25)

1. Marketing
2. Management
3. Advertising/Economics
4. English
5. Radio/TV/Film

More than half of the practitioners Bobo surveyed (55.6%) answered "no" to the following question, "Based on the requirements of your job, do you think graduates of public relations sequences of the past five years possess enough knowledge in business (such as budgeting, report

writing, etc.) to function successfully in public relations?" (26)

Practitioners were also asked to name one subject area they felt necessary for successful functioning in public relations. Business administration was the overwhelming choice, with economics a distant second, then accounting. (27)

In Cooper's study, practitioners were asked for their attitudes toward statements concerning public relations education. Participants in Cooper's study rated the following statements on a five point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree): (28)

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
Basic marketing knowledge a must for public relations.	4.000
Public relations students should be trained in management.	3.635
Business courses most important elective.	3.485

In a 1977 study by Labotka, the question "In which of the following areas would you have liked to have had more course work?" was asked of public relations professionals. The response indicated an overwhelming slant toward the need for more business courses, as four of the top five choices were of a business orientation. The choices listed in order of importance were: (29)

1. Management
2. Marketing
3. Graphics
4. Economics

5. Finance

Extra-Curricular Activities

Preferred by Employers

The "Catch-22" of public relations is that while employers are looking for employees with experience, students often have to scramble to attain the much coveted, but few, internship programs offered by their school, if such programs are offered at all.

This leaves the student in a frustrating predicament. The student can't get a job without experience, and often can't find a job to get that experience. While there is no lack of vocal support for internship programs and few doubt its worth when it comes time to interview, the problem remains that there are many advocates of internship programs, but few practitioners willing to spend the time to foster an internship program.

The 1987 Commission found that practitioners and educators alike gave an internship/practicum/work-study program the highest recommendation for public relations education. While such a course is ideal in theory, it is often improbable for a variety of reasons.

Problems with Internship Programs

First is the instance that in many college towns, unless close to a metropolitan area, the supply of

organizations willing to spend the time needed to provide practical public relations experience is limited. Another limitation may be the number of, or rather the lack of, experienced public relations professionals in the community.

The second reason is a direct result of the first, while there may be a few organizations willing to foster an internship program, only a handful of students will be able to take advantage of such an opportunity.

Another reason is a simple matter of economics. Not all students are willing or able to give up a job at the local construction site or supermarket for a job as a summer intern or during the semester that pays little or nothing at all. While such an opportunity to intern would undoubtedly be beneficial to the student in the long run, it may not be financially feasible while in college.

The fourth reason public relations internships are difficult to offer is the vast amount time that is needed to successfully run an internship program. An internship for course credit not only takes up a large part of the educator's time planning and evaluating the intern's performance, it is often more of a burden on the host business than it is worth since large amounts of time must be spent showing the intern "the ropes." Furthermore, in order for the student to gain valuable work experience, at least ten hours a week is needed. This is in addition to

the student's other course work and possibly another job.

In his study, Bobo asked practitioners, "If you received two job applications, one with a bachelor's degree in journalism/pr and two years' work experience, the other with a master's degree in journalism/pr and no work experience, whom would you hire?" (30)

Overwhelmingly, practitioners chose the applicant with a bachelor's degree and two years' experience. While in reality this question ignores the possibility that a student may also be getting job experience while working on a master's degree, as a gauge of an employer's preference of experience over education, this question is quite revealing. The Public Relations Society of America has pushed hard for its accredited schools to start a Pro-Am (professional-amateur) program. Under this program, a PRSA professional is matched with an upper-level undergraduate student in an attempt to provide the student with public relations experience, though not necessarily for course credit.

Student Reporters

While practical experience as a reporter for the school newspaper no longer carries the weight it once did in terms of public relations experience, it is still seen as a valuable experience for an undergraduate to have participated in.

In Kalupa and Allen's study, practitioners and educators were surveyed on the future direction of public relations education. Of the respondents questioned, almost one-quarter (24.1%) disagreed with the statement "On-the-job newspaper training, while still helpful, will not be as important in public relations hiring in the 1980's as it has been." (31)

In her study, Fitzpatrick asked practitioners for their views on work experience outside the field of public relations. When practitioners listed work experience outside the field of public relations as important, journalism was listed as most important. The list of work experience listed as important were as follows: (32)

<u>Field</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Journalism	14.0
Business	4.7
Student's special area of interest	4.7
Newspaper reporting	3.5
Writing and editing	2.9
Communications	1.8
Advertising	1.2

While research on the importance of extra-curricular activities is sparse at best, this area of a student's college learning experience should not go unresearched.

Alternatives to an Internship

So where is the student to get the valuable experience employers want? A vast number of opportunities exist in addition to an internship for

course credit.

Jobs such as serving as president of a social club or shift manager at a local fast food establishment may highlight a student's management skills. Serving as social coordinator for a campus group may give a student experience in organizing and promoting events. Serving as a writer for the school paper or yearbook may enhance writing and editing skills taught in formal classrooms. This study will address such extra-curricular activities to determine whether these activities are viewed as important to employers.

Summary of the Literature Reviewed

Based on the literature reviewed, it appears that practitioners prefer experience and skill/knowledge over theory. While this preference for experience over skill/knowledge may not come as a surprise, what is interesting is the seeming decline in the importance of newswriting experience as a prerequisite for public relations work, despite the preponderance of former media personnel in the public relations field.

While the ability to write well was highly rated by practitioners, the need for more business knowledge was emphasized along with the need for more hands on training (internships). The research mentioned in this chapter echoes earlier studies dating back to the 1960's calling

for more business courses in public relations curricula.

Practitioners seem to indicate a preference for a broad combination of writing skills matched with business knowledge, along with a wide range of liberal arts courses ranging from psychology and sociology to English for the public relations major.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the procedures and methods used to conduct this study. Included in this chapter is a description of the research methodology used as well as the research design, the selection of the population and sample, research instruments used, data collection and analysis procedures, methodological assumptions, limitations of the study, and a brief summary.

Research Methodology

Data reflecting practitioners' attitudes toward public relations education was gathered through the use of a mail survey questionnaire. The questionnaire used a combination of forced decision questions which asked participants to numerically rank course preferences as well as a rating scale used to determine practitioners' perceived importance ratings of courses. (See Appendix A.)

Research Design

The dependent variable in this study was the course ratings and rankings by employers. The main independent variables were the course offerings. Other independent variables included: the type of public relations organization a practitioner works for, the practitioner's educational background, and the number of years of work experience.

The relationships which were examined included: (1) the relationship between the skills taught in a public relations degree sequence and the perceived importance of those skills to practitioners, (2) the relationship between the skills taught in business courses and the perceived importance of those skills to practitioners, and (3) the relationship between the non-academic activities a student participates in and the perceived importance of those activities to practitioners.

A relationship between practitioner preference for a student with a high grade point average and the importance rating for a high overall grade point average was expected, but was thought to be rated as secondary to other applicant characteristics such as activities, courses taken, field-of-study grade point average, internships, and scholarships/awards.

The hypothesis for this study was that practitioners would rate theory on an equal balance with practical

experience.

Pilot Study

After the sample population was drawn, an additional ten practitioners were drawn from the remaining list to participate in a pilot study to determine the clarity and validity of the questionnaire. The pilot study was conducted three weeks prior to the initial mailing. One week after the responses from the pilot study had been returned and the indicated changes were made, the questionnaire was mailed to the sample population. (See Appendix B.)

Population

The population for the study included all public relations practitioners in the seven-state region of Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Sample Population

The sample for this study was drawn from Public Relations Society of America members in the seven-state region who were listed in the 1988 Public Relations Society of America Directory, except for those members listed as professors, retired, or associate members (members for less than two-years). The sample of 200

public relations practitioners was randomly drawn from the directory using a table of random numbers.

A regional, rather than national, sample population for the study was selected for several reasons: (1) It was felt that the degree of questionnaire response would be better with a regional study, (2) It was hoped that public relations employers might see the advantage of helping to improve public relations education if the fruits of such an education might be future applicants from the region of study, (3) The results of such a study would have more relevance to public relations students in the seven-state region.

Data Collected

The core of the questionnaire consisted of six questions, three asking participants to numerically rank courses, and three asking for course ratings.

The first three questions asked participants to rank their top five choices in three different areas: (1) public relations courses, (2) business courses, (3) extra-curricular activities. Participants were asked to rank their choices on a scale of one to five, with one being the most important course and five being the fifth most important. This question gave the participants' top five choices in each of the listed areas.

The second three questions asked participants to rate

the importance of each course/activity in three different areas: (1) public relations courses, (2) business courses, (3) extra-curricular activities. A five space semantic differential scale ranging from "not important" to "very important" was used for these questions. These three questions were of value because they allowed the practitioner to rate each offering in each of the three areas rather than only asking for the five most important offerings.

In addition to the rating of individual courses and activities, employers were also asked to rate (using a five space semantic differential scale ranging from "not important" to "very important") the importance of the following when considering hiring an applicant:

- * The importance of an applicant's overall grade point average.
- * The importance of an applicant's field-of-study grade point average.
- * The importance of taking business courses or a minor in business.
- * The overall usefulness or effectiveness of a college public relations degree (PRSA accredited) once in the "real world."

Practitioners were asked to indicate the type of public relations organization they worked for as well as their educational background and years of experience in the public relations field.

Practitioners were also asked whether or not their organization gives applicants an entrance exam to

determine writing ability. The job title of the person responsible for hiring was also asked. (See Appendix C.)

Initial and Follow-up Mailings

Questionnaires and cover letters were mailed to the sample of two-hundred practitioners in mid-March. In mid-April, a second questionnaire and cover letter was mailed to those practitioners who did not respond to the initial mailing. A third mailing was needed to gather a response rate of 71 percent. The third mailing was sent in early May. (See Appendix D.)

Data Collection and Recording

Questionnaires were returned via a self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher with each mailing of the questionnaire. Questionnaire results were then coded and entered into a computer.

Analysis of Data

Individual score rankings/ratings were analyzed to determine relationships between/among courses, activities, and other variables.

The results of course/activity rankings for each of the three areas of skill are displayed in table form, as are the course/activity ratings for each area of skill. Relationships between/among independent variables are

arranged in table form.

Limitations and Weaknesses

The limitations and weaknesses which are involved with any mail survey were also encountered in this study. Perhaps the most important limitation was the response rate. A response rate of 70 percent was sought to provide valid and accurate data.

Another limitation is the possibility that the questions asked do not reflect the intent of the research themes being tested, that the questions asked do not accurately allow practitioners to present their views on public relations education. The pilot study was conducted to lessen the possibility of this limitation.

Another limitation is that the selection of the sample population from the Public Relations Society of America directory would preclude any other public relations practitioner from participating in the study. Public relations practitioners who were not Public Relations Society of America members were not asked for their views on public relations education.

The geographic region chosen represents yet another limitation. This study was limited to those public relations practitioners who resided in the seven-state region of Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Finally, any study will be limited to the time frame in which it is conducted. This study was also limited to the time frame in which it was conducted, Spring 1989.

Methodological Assumptions

In order to properly conduct this study, several assumptions in the methodology used had to be made. Among the presumptions made were:

- 1.) The assumption that the questionnaire was completed by those Public Relations Society of America members who were in charge of hiring entry-level public relations employers.
- 2.) The assumption that participants involved in the study answered questions candidly and in an unbiased manner.
- 3.) The assumption that the pretest eliminated any misunderstanding or confusion and the instructions were easily understood. It was also assumed that the questionnaire was sufficient in content to accurately complete the objectives of this study.

Summary

The research approach used in this study was a mailed survey questionnaire which asked practitioners to rank their top five course preferences in both public relations and business. Practitioner rankings of extra-curricular.

activities were also asked.

Practitioners were asked to rate the importance of courses in public relations, business and in extra-curricular activities. In addition to the rating of individual courses and activities, practitioners were asked to rate the importance of an applicant's grade point average, the importance of having a minor in business, and the overall usefulness of a public relations degree.

Practitioners were also asked whether or not their organization gives applicants an entrance exam to determine writing ability. Practitioners were also asked to give the job title of the person responsible for hiring.

Subjects for this study were randomly drawn from a list of Public Relations Society of America members and a pilot study was conducted to determine the relevance and clarity of questions asked.

Data was coded and entered into a computer for analysis. Analysis of variance was used to determine relationships between/among variables.

Limitations of this study included: the possibility of a low response rate, the validity of the questions asked, the sample population, the geographic region, and those limitations incurred by the time frame in which the study was conducted.

CHAPTER 1V

FINDINGS

General

Questionnaires were mailed to 200 PRSA members in the seven-state region of Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The initial mailing resulted in the return of 96 questionnaires (48 percent). A second mailing was then sent and another 40 questionnaires were returned for a total response rate of 68 percent after the second mailing. Another four questionnaires were needed in order to fulfill the widely accepted response rate of 70 percent. The third mailing resulted in 18 questionnaires being returned for a total of 154 questionnaires.

Of the 154 questionnaires which were returned, 12 questionnaires were incomplete and deleted from this study. A total of 142 questionnaires were completed correctly and subsequently used for this study. The response rate for this study was 71 percent.

Characteristics of Respondents

Practitioners' Work Areas

Respondents were asked to check the type of public relations organization they work for. Of the respondents, almost one-third (32 percent) categorized themselves as corporate public relations professionals. Those who indicated that they worked for a public relations agency totaled 37 (26 percent). Other respondents indicated that they worked in non-profit (15 percent), education and other (9 percent each), business (5 percent), and government (4 percent). Table I shows the breakdown of public relations practitioners by the public relations area in which they work.

TABLE I

PUBLIC RELATIONS AREAS IN WHICH RESPONDENTS WORK

Ranking	Organization	N	Percent
1	Corporate	46	32.4
2	Agency	37	26.0
3	Non-Profit	21	14.8
4	Education	13	9.2
5	Other	12	8.5
6	Business	7	4.9
7	Government	6	4.2
TOTALS		142	100.0

Practitioners' Educational Background

Respondents were asked to indicate their educational

background. Of the respondents surveyed, almost half (44 percent) had earned a degree in print/broadcast journalism.

What was surprising was the number of respondents who marked the "other" category (26 percent). Of these respondents, almost half (43 percent) earned a degree in English. Table II shows the breakdown of public relations practitioners by educational training.

TABLE II
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

Ranking	Degree	N	Percent
1	Print/Broadcast Journalism	62	43.7
2	Other	37	26.0
	Agriculture	(1)	
	Anthropology	(1)	
	Art	(1)	
	Education	(3)	
	English	(16)	
	History	(2)	
	Liberal Arts	(4)	
	No Degree	(1)	
	Pharmacology	(1)	
	Political Science	(5)	
	Sociology	(1)	
	Theology	(1)	
3	Public Relations	28	19.7
4	Business	15	10.6
TOTALS		142	100.0

Practitioners' Experience

Respondents were asked to indicate their number of years of public relations experience. Of the respondents, 66 (46 percent) said they had over 15 years of experience,

27 (19 percent) indicated they had between six and ten years of experience, 25 (18 percent) indicated they had between 11 and 15 years of experience, and 24 (17 percent) indicated they had between zero and five years of experience. Table III shows the breakdown of public relations practitioners by years of experience.

TABLE III
RESPONDENTS' YEARS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERIENCE

Ranking	Years of Experience	N	Percent
1	15 +	66	46.5
2	6-10	27	19.0
3	11-15	25	17.6
4	0-5	24	16.9
TOTALS		142	100.0

Course Rankings

Public Relations Courses

Respondents were asked to rank the top five public relations courses that are important for an undergraduate public relations student to have taken. Respondents ranked courses on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important course and 5 being the least important course. Table IV shows practitioners' ranking of public relations courses.

TABLE IV
TOP FIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES

Ranking	Course	N	Percent*
1	Newswriting	63	44.4
2	News Editing	42	29.6
3	Public Relations Lab/Internship	25	17.6
4	Case Studies in Public Relations	25	17.6
	Public Relations Media	25	17.6
	Public Relations Programs	25	17.6
5	Public Relations Lab/Internship	29	20.4

(* Percentages do not total 100 due to ranking of the top five courses and ordinal data.)

Business Courses

Respondents were asked to rank the top five business courses that are important for an undergraduate public relations student to have taken. Respondents ranked courses on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important course and 5 being the least important course. Table V shows practitioners' ranking of business courses.

TABLE V
TOP FIVE BUSINESS COURSES

Ranking	Course	N	Percent*
1	Marketing	79	55.6
2	Management	69	48.6
3	Economics	41	28.9
4	Finance	54	38.0
5	Accounting	76	53.5

(* Percentages do not total 100 due to ranking of the top five courses and ordinal data.)

Extra-Curricular Activities

Respondents were asked to rank the top five extra-curricular activities that are important for an undergraduate public relations student to have taken. Respondents ranked courses on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important course and 5 being the least important course.

The activity which respondents ranked as the highest in each ranking option, from one to five, was used for this study. Subsequently, volunteer work with a public relations organization was ranked as both the second and third most preferred extra-curricular activity. Table VI shows practitioners' ranking of extra-curricular activities.

TABLE VI
TOP FIVE EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Ranking	Activity	N	Percent*
1	Public Relations Internship	66	46.5
2	Volunteer Work with a Public Relations Organization	45	31.7
3	Volunteer Work with a Public Relations Organization	43	30.3
4	PRSSA Member	41	28.9
5	Non-Public Relations Work Scholarships, Grants, Awards	41	28.9

(* Percentages do not total 100 due to ranking of the top five activities and ordinal data.)

Course Ratings

Public Relations Courses

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of public relations courses on a semantic differential scale with five blanks. The words on the left-hand side of the scale read "not important" and the words on the right-hand side of the scale read "very important." Table VII shows practitioners' ratings of public relations courses.

TABLE VII
RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES

Rating	Course	Mean*
1	Newswriting	4.7
2	Public Relations Lab/Internship	4.4
3	Principles of Public Relations	4.4
4	News Editing	4.3
5	Public Relations Media	4.3
6	Case Studies in Public Relations	4.1
7	Public Relations Programs	4.1
8	Visual Communication	3.6
9	Mass Communication Law	3.4

(* 1=not important; 5=very important.)

Business Courses

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of business courses on a semantic differential scale with five blanks. The words on the left-hand side of the scale read "not important" and the words on the right-hand side of the scale read "very important." Table VIII shows

practitioners' ratings of business courses.

TABLE VIII
RESPONDENTS' RATING OF BUSINESS COURSES

Rating	Course	Mean*
1	Marketing	4.6
2	Management	4.2
3	Economics	3.5
4	Finance	3.4
5	Accounting	3.0

(* 1=not important; 5=very important.)

Extra-Curricular Activities

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of extra-curricular activities on a semantic differential scale with five blanks. The words on the left-hand side of the scale read "not important" and the words on the right-hand side of the scale read "very important." Table IX shows practitioners' ratings of extra-curricular activities.

TABLE IX
RESPONDENTS' RATING OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Rating	Activity	Mean*
1	Public Relations Internship	4.5
2	Reporter	4.3
3	Volunteer with a Public Relations Organization	4.2
4	Public Relations Student Society of America Member	3.4
5	Scholarships, Grants, Awards	3.4

TABLE IX (Continued)

6	Non-Public Relations Work	3.0
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(* 1=not important; 5=very important.)

Ratings of Specific Statements

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of specific statements on a semantic differential scale with five blanks. The words on the left-hand side of the scale read "not important" and the words on the right-hand side of the scale read "very important." The respondents rated the importance of each of the following: The importance of an applicant's overall grade point average; The importance of an applicant's grade point average in public relations courses; The importance of taking business courses or a minor in business; The overall usefulness or effectiveness of a college public relations degree (PRSA accredited) once in the "real world." Table X shows practitioners' ratings of specific statements.

TABLE X
RESPONDENTS' RATING OF SPECIFIC STATEMENTS

Rating	Statement	Mean*
1	Public Relations G.P.A.	4.1
2	Importance of Business Courses	4.0
3	Overall G.P.A.	3.9
4	Public Relations Degree	3.6

(* 1=not important; 5=very important.)

Other Questions

Written Exam

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their organization requires job applicants to take a written exam to determine writing ability. A total of 58 percent said their organization did not require applicants to take a writing exam. Forty-Two percent said their organization did require applicants to take a writing exam. Table XI shows the breakdown of public relations organizations which require an applicant to take a written exam.

TABLE XI

RESPONDENTS WHO GAVE A WRITTEN TEST TO APPLICANTS

Response	N	Percent
No	83	58.0
Yes	59	42.0
TOTALS	142	100.0

Job Title of Personnel Responsible for Hiring

Respondents were asked to give the job title of the person responsible for hiring public relations personnel. A majority of the respondents chose not to answer this question. Subsequently, this question was deleted from the study.

Advice from Practitioners

Respondents were asked what advice they would give to any public relations student entering the field. The goal was to solicit input from the "seasoned" public relations professional; what advice would such a professional offer a budding public relations professional? While all responses could not be listed here, the following is a summary of the advice given.

Practitioners' Advice On the Importance of Writing Ability

"Learn to write logically and with correct grammar and spelling; gain as much experience and knowledge as possible about the way TV and newspaper reporters work, how they spend their days, how stories move from idea to finished product; next, learn about the role and influence of corporations in American society."

"Most college graduates we see still make common grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. Go to work for a newspaper first. I feel newspapers provide the best training ground for pr managers."

"Don't ignore the importance of understanding how the broadcast media operates. Public relations courses tend to be weighted toward the print media, but the fact is that in the "real world" you'll be dealing with the broadcast media as often as the print media. You need to understand how they function to work efficiently."

"Write for publication. Show me articles you've written for the school paper, local papers, magazines, etc. - Show me speeches, scripts, radio PSA's, brochures, communication proposals, newsletters, etc. - All of it!"

"Good grades are important, but a good 90 percent of all resumes I receive claim GPA's of 3.6 or better. The sooner a student can replace GPA with hard evidence of communication skills and experience, the better. Get some practical experience - even if it's pro bono work for a local non-profit organization. And don't bore me with all

the officer titles you've held in a college fraternity or sorority."

"Positive attitude and human relations skills coupled with effective writing and verbal skills lead to success in this business."

Practitioners' Advice On the Importance of Internships, Extra-Curricular Activities, and a Broad Liberal Arts Background

"Internships are vital today to gain experience in a relatively risk-free environment. I'd pick someone with a successful internship over someone with a 4.0 GPA anytime."

"Actively participate in PRSSA events, from planning to implementation, and interact with professional PRSA members as much as possible. (Don't neglect other groups, ie WICI or IABC - They are important too!)"

"The ability to think, analyze, and connect is crucial. Get a broad liberal arts background first and specialize later in graduate school."

"I'd add courses in pr research methods, market or audience segmentation, persuasion, and a basic understanding of the behavioral sciences such as psychology and sociology. The student should also be aware that a degree is only the first step in a lifelong learning program if he/she is to be an effective public relations professional."

On the Importance of an Understanding of Business

"Public relations has matured. It is no longer enough to be a good journalist. Public relations professionals are knowledgeable about all aspects of business. They must be if they are to offer sound, effective advice."

"The most serious dilemma facing public relations professionals today is not addressed in this study. It is the ability of a practitioner to justify his work to his business/sales-oriented superiors/clients. This means the productive use of research before, during, and after

public relations programs that provides hard, meaningful evidence of the effect of the programs. This does not mean counting press clippings or documenting media coverage of a promotional event... (it) means translating the work and effect of programs into sales, market share, and measurable community awareness. It is imperative that college public relations curriculums develop required courses on the use of research in public relations. If not, the marketing profession will swallow up public relations in the next 10-15 years."

Respondents were also asked to add any additional comments they might have. Most of the comments given were directed to the author and were of no relevance to this study.

Relationships Between Respondent Characteristics and Respondent Rankings

Responses to questions concerning the type of public relations organization respondents worked for, type of education, and years of public relations experience were analyzed to determine if any unusual interaction occurred between these variables.

Public Relations Organization and Education

Of the respondents who categorized themselves as working in corporate public relations, the largest number, 15 percent, had earned a degree in print/broadcast journalism.

The second largest percentage grouping earned a degree in public relations and were currently working for a public relations agency.

There were no respondents who both worked in the field of public relations education with a degree in business, nor were there any respondents who both worked for the government and earned a degree in the "other" category. Table XII cross references practitioners' public relations organization by their education.

TABLE XII
RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
AREA OF WORK

<u>Organization</u>	N	<u>Education</u>							
		PR		Journalism		Business		Other	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agency	37	7	(4.9)	16	(11.3)	4	(2.8)	10	(7.0)
Non-Profit	21	7	(4.9)	6	(4.2)	2	(1.4)	6	(4.2)
Government	6	1	(0.7)	3	(2.1)	2	(1.4)	0	(0.0)
Corporate	46	9	(6.3)	22	(15.5)	4	(2.8)	11	(7.8)
Business	7	1	(0.7)	4	(2.8)	1	(0.7)	1	(0.7)
Education	13	1	(0.7)	6	(4.2)	0	(0.0)	6	(4.2)
Other	12	2	(1.4)	5	(3.5)	2	(1.4)	3	(2.1)
TOTALS	142	28	19.6*	62	43.6*	15	10.5*	37	26.0*

(* Percentages do not equal 100 due to computer rounding.)

Public Relations Organization and Experience

The largest number of public relations professionals in this grouping have over 15 years of experience and work for a corporation. The second highest percentage in this grouping work for an agency and have over 15 years of experience. It seemed unusual that those respondents who worked in the field of business had either six to ten years of experience (one percent) or over 15 years of

experience (four percent).

There were no respondents in the field of business public relations who had zero to five years of experience or who had 11-15 years of experience. Table XIII cross references practitioners' public relations organization by their experience.

TABLE XIII
RESPONDENTS' PUBLIC RELATIONS AREA OF WORK
AND EXPERIENCE

<u>Organization</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Experience</u>							
		0-5		6-10		11-15		15+	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agency	37	5	(3.6)	9	(6.3)	7	(4.9)	16	(11.3)
Non-Profit	21	7	(4.9)	5	(3.5)	1	(0.7)	8	(5.6)
Government	6	1	(0.7)	1	(0.7)	1	(0.7)	3	(2.1)
Corporate	46	6	(4.2)	6	(4.2)	10	(7.0)	24	(16.9)
Business	7	0	(0.0)	2	(1.4)	0	(0.0)	5	(3.5)
Education	13	2	(1.4)	3	(2.1)	4	(2.8)	4	(2.8)
Other	12	3	(2.1)	1	(0.7)	2	(1.4)	6	(4.2)
TOTALS	142	24	16.9*	27	18.9*	25	17.5*	66	46.4*

(* Percentages do not equal 100 due to computer rounding.)

Public Relations Organization and Test

The only type of public relations organization which said it gave tests more often than not to applicants was the respondents in the field of business public relations. In all other types of public relations organizations, the number who did not give tests to applicants was greater than those who did. Table XIV cross references practitioners' public relations organization by whether

their organization gives applicants a written exam.

TABLE XIV

WHETHER APPLICANTS ARE GIVEN A WRITTEN TEST BY
PUBLIC RELATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

<u>Organization</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>	
		N	%	N	%
Agency	37	17	(12.0)	20	(14.1)
Non-Profit	21	7	(4.9)	14	(9.9)
Government	6	3	(2.1)	3	(2.1)
Corporate	46	19	(13.4)	27	(19.0)
Business	7	4	(2.8)	3	(2.1)
Education	13	5	(3.5)	8	(5.6)
Other	12	4	(2.8)	8	(5.6)
TOTALS	142	59	41.5*	83	58.4*

(* Percentages do not equal 100 due to computer rounding.)

Respondents' Education and Experience

Of the respondents with over 15 years of experience, 23 percent indicated they earned a degree in print/broadcast journalism. In fact, a degree in journalism scored the highest in every age group. Those who received their degree in public relations and had between 0-5 years of experience came in a close second to a degree in journalism. Possibly this is an indication of the increased importance being placed on a public relations degree.

The fact that older practitioners earned a degree in journalism more than any other field does not seem unusual since journalism was once, and to some extent still is,

thought of as the preferred training for the public relations professional.

There does, however, seem to be a shortage in the number of public relations professionals who have 11-15 years of experience who earned a degree in either public relations or business (one percent each). Perhaps this is due to the fact that until recently business majors were thought to lack the writing skills needed for public relations and the public relations curriculum was seen to be inferior to a journalism degree. Table XV cross references practitioners' public relations education by their experience.

TABLE XV
EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS

<u>Degree</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Years of Experience</u>							
		<u>0-5</u>		<u>6-10</u>		<u>11-15</u>		<u>15+</u>	
		<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Public Relations	28	9	(6.3)	6	(4.2)	2	(1.4)	11	(7.8)*
Journalism	62	8	(5.6)	10	(7.0)	12	(8.5)	32	(22.5)
Business	15	4	(2.8)	2	(1.4)	2	(1.4)	7	(4.9)
Other	37	3	(2.1)	9	(6.3)	9	(6.3)	16	(11.3)
TOTALS	142	24	16.8**	27	18.9**	25	17.6**	66	46.5**

(* Of those respondents who indicated two degrees, the most recent degree attained was used for this study.)

(** Percentages do not equal 100 due to computer rounding.)

Public Relations Course Rankings
and Respondents' Area of Work

The field of public relations is diverse and the training needed for each aspect of public relations work varies from organization to organization. All of the organizations studied ranked newswriting as the top course. The only other course which appeared somewhere in all of the organizations' rankings was public relations lab.

Only those respondents who indicated they worked in government public relations ranked mass communication law in the top five. The course visual communication was ranked in the top five only by those who worked in government public relations or the category "other," and in both instances visual communication was ranked as the last choice. Table XVI cross references practitioners' rankings of public relations courses by their area of work.

TABLE XVI
 RANKING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES BY
 RESPONDENTS' AREA OF WORK

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
	AGENCY			
1.		News writing	13	9.2
2.		News editing	10	7.0
3.		PR principles	8	5.6
		PR lab	8	5.6
4.		PR programs	11	7.8

TABLE XVI (Continued)

5.		PR programs	8	5.6
	NON-PROFIT			
1.		Newswriting	9	6.3
2.		News editing	6	4.2
3.		PR lab	5	3.5
		PR programs	6	4.2
4.		PR media	4	2.8
5.		PR principles	4	2.8
		PR lab		
	GOVERNMENT			
1.		Newswriting	3	2.1
2.		Newswriting	2	1.4
		PR lab	2	1.4
3.		Case studies	1	0.7
		Communication law	1	0.7
		PR principles	1	0.7
		PR lab	1	0.7
		PR media	1	0.7
		Visual communication	1	0.7
4.		Case studies	2	1.4
5.		Visual communication	2	1.4
	CORPORATE			
1.		Newswriting	22	15.5
2.		Newswriting	17	11.9
		PR lab	17	11.9
3.		PR media	10	7.0
4.		Case studies	11	7.8
5.		PR lab	13	2.1
	BUSINESS			
1.		Newswriting	4	2.8
2.		Newswriting	2	1.4
3.		PR principles	3	2.1
4.		PR programs	2	1.4
5.		PR lab	3	2.1
	EDUCATION			
1.		Newswriting	5	3.5
		PR principles	5	3.5
2.		Case studies	4	2.8
		Newswriting	4	2.8
3.		PR programs	5	3.5
4.		PR lab	4	2.8
5.		Case studies	4	2.8
	OTHER			
1.		Newswriting	7	4.9
2.		Newswriting	5	3.5
3.		PR lab	3	2.1
4.		Case studies	3	2.1
5.		PR media	3	2.1
		Visual communication	3	2.1

Business Course Rankings and
Respondents' Area of Work

Every organization except for the category other ranked marketing as the top business course for the public relations curriculum. The category other ranked marketing as second, behind management. Marketing was the second most preferred course. Accounting was the last choice for all organizations. Table XVII cross references practitioners' rankings of business courses by their area of work.

TABLE XVII
RANKING OF BUSINESS COURSES BY RESPONDENTS'
AREA OF WORK

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>

AGENCY				
1.		Marketing	27	19.0
2.		Management	27	19.0
3.		Finance	15	10.6
4.		Accounting	13	9.1
5.		Accounting	16	11.3
NON-PROFIT				
1.		Marketing	14	9.9
2.		Management	10	7.0
3.		Finance	8	5.6
4.		Economics	7	4.9
		Finance	7	4.9
5.		Accounting	12	8.5
GOVERNMENT				
1.		Marketing	2	1.4
		Management	2	1.4
2.		Marketing	4	2.8
3.		Finance	3	2.1
4.		Economics	3	2.1
5.		Accounting	5	3.5
CORPORATE				
1.		Marketing	20	14.1

TABLE XVII (Continued)

2.		Management	15	10.6
3.		Economics	11	7.8
4.		Finance	19	13.4
5.		Accounting	24	16.9
	BUSINESS			
1.		Marketing	3	2.1
		Economics	3	2.1
2.		Management	4	2.8
3.		Finance	3	2.1
4.		Accounting	3	2.1
		Finance	3	2.1
5.		Accounting	4	2.8
	EDUCATION			
1.		Marketing	10	7.0
2.		Management	9	6.3
3.		Economics	5	3.5
4.		Finance	8	5.6
5.		Accounting	9	6.3
	OTHER			
1.		Management	4	2.8
2.		Marketing	5	3.5
3.		Accounting	4	2.8
		Economics	4	2.8
4.		Finance	5	3.5
		Management	5	3.5
5.		Accounting	6	4.2

Extra-Curricular Activities

Rankings and Respondents'

Area of Work

A public relations internship was the top activity in all organizations except for government public relations, which ranked it as the second most important. Other preferred activities included volunteer work with a public relations organization and reporter for school paper. Table XVIII cross references practitioners' rankings of extra-curricular activities by their area of work.

TABLE XVIII
RANKING OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY
RESPONDENTS' AREA OF WORK

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>

AGENCY				
1.		PR internship	18	12.7
2.		Volunteer	12	8.5
3.		Volunteer	11	7.8
4.		PRSSA member	12	8.5
5.		Non-PR work	18	12.7
NON-PROFIT				
1.		PR internship	11	7.8
2.		PR internship	7	4.9
		Volunteer	7	4.9
3.		Reporter	9	6.4
4.		Non-PR work	8	5.6
5.		Non-PR work	6	4.2
		PRSSA member	6	4.2
		Scholarship/grants	6	4.2
GOVERNMENT				
1.		Reporter	3	2.1
2.		PR internship	2	1.4
		Volunteer	2	1.4
3.		Volunteer	2	1.4
4.		Scholarships/grants	3	2.1
5.		Non-PR work	3	2.1
CORPORATE				
1.		PR internship	19	13.4
2.		PR internship	16	11.3
3.		Volunteer	18	12.7
4.		PRSSA member	13	9.2
5.		PRSSA member	14	9.9
		Scholarships/grants	14	9.9
BUSINESS				
1.		PR internship	3	2.1
		Reporter	3	2.1
2.		Volunteer	3	2.1
3.		PR internship	2	1.4
		Reporter	2	1.4
4.		PRSSA member	2	1.4
		Volunteer	2	1.4
5.		PRSSA member	3	2.1
EDUCATION				
1.		PR internship	8	5.6
2.		Volunteer	7	4.9
3.		Reporter	6	4.2
4.		PRSSA member	5	3.5
5.		Scholarships/grants	5	3.5

TABLE XVIII (Continued)

OTHER				
1.		PR internship	5	3.5
		Reporter	5	3.5
2.		Volunteer	4	2.8
3.		PR internship	4	2.8
		Reporter	4	2.8
4.		Volunteer	5	3.5
5.		Scholarships/grants	5	3.5

Public Relations Course Rankings
and Respondents' Education

Also of interest was how respondents ranked courses and activities with respect to their individual educational backgrounds. It was not surprising to find that respondents who earned a degree in either public relations or journalism ranked newswriting as the top course. Both business and other majors preferred the course principles of public relations as the top choice. Table XVIV cross references practitioners' rankings of public relations courses by their education.

TABLE XIX

RANKING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES BY
 RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
PUBLIC RELATIONS				
1.		Newswriting	11	7.8
2.		Newswriting	9	6.3
3.		PR lab	7	4.9
4.		PR media	8	5.6
5.		PR programs	7	4.9

TABLE XIX (Continued)

JOURNALISM				
1.		Newswriting	40	28.2
2.		News editing	26	18.3
3.		PR principles	15	10.6
4.		PR programs	14	9.9
5.		Case studies	14	9.9
BUSINESS				
1.		PR principles	6	4.3
2.		PR programs	4	2.8
3.		Case studies	3	2.1
		Newswriting	3	2.1
		PR lab	3	2.1
4.		Newswriting	4	2.8
5.		PR principles	3	2.1
		PR media	3	2.1
OTHER				
1.		PR principles	14	9.9
2.		Case studies	8	5.6
		Newswriting	8	5.6
3.		Newswriting	6	4.2
		PR media	6	4.2
		PR programs	6	4.2
4.		PR principles	7	4.9
5.		PR lab	12	8.5

Business Course Rankings and

Respondents' Education

Marketing was the top business course for all types of educational background. Management was second. Again, all chose accounting as the least recommended course for the public relations major. Table XX cross references practitioners' rankings of business courses by their education.

TABLE XX
RANKING OF BUSINESS COURSES BY RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
PUBLIC RELATIONS				
1.		Marketing	19	13.4
2.		Management	14	9.9
3.		Economics	9	6.3
		Finance	9	6.3
4.		Accounting	9	6.3
5.		Accounting	9	6.3
JOURNALISM				
1.		Marketing	29	20.4
2.		Marketing	24	16.9
3.		Finance	17	12.0
4.		Finance	23	16.2
5.		Accounting	36	25.4
BUSINESS				
1.		Marketing	10	7.0
2.		Management	8	5.6
3.		Finance	5	3.5
4.		Economics	6	4.2
5.		Accounting	8	5.6
OTHER				
1.		Marketing	21	14.8
2.		Management	23	16.2
3.		Economics	14	9.9
4.		Finance	18	12.7
5.		Accounting	23	16.2

Extra-Curricular Activities Rankings
and Respondents' Education

Educational background was not a factor in choosing the top extra-curricular activity for the public relations student. A public relations internship was the most recommended, with volunteer work with a public relations organization coming in second. Table XXI cross references practitioners' rankings of extra-curricular activities by

their education.

TABLE XXI
RANKING OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY
RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
PUBLIC RELATIONS				
1.		PR internship	14	9.9
2.		PR internship	9	6.3
3.		Volunteer	11	7.8
4.		PRSSA member	12	8.5
5.		Scholarships	10	7.0
JOURNALISM				
1.		PR internship	26	18.3
2.		PR internship	19	13.4
		Volunteer	19	13.4
3.		Volunteer	21	14.8
4.		Reporter	18	12.7
5.		Non-PR work	21	14.8
BUSINESS				
1.		PR lab	8	5.6
2.		Volunteer	6	4.2
3.		PRSSA member	6	4.2
4.		Reporter	4	2.8
5.		PRSSA member	5	3.5
		Scholarships/grants	5	3.5
OTHER				
1.		PR lab	18	12.7
2.		Volunteer	12	8.5
3.		PRSSA member	10	7.0
4.		Non-PR work	8	5.6
		PRSSA member	8	5.6
		Volunteer	8	5.6
5.		Scholarships/grants	11	7.8

Public Relations Course Rankings
and Respondents' Experience

When ranking the top public relations course, the number of years of experience a respondent had was not a factor. Newswriting was the top choice for all categories

of experience. News editing was the second most preferred course. Table XXII cross references practitioners' rankings of public relations courses by their experience.

TABLE XXII
RANKING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES BY
RESPONDENTS' EXPERIENCE

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Experience</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>

0-5 YEARS				
1.		Newswriting	11	7.8
2.		News editing	9	6.3
3.		PR lab	8	5.6
4.		Case studies	5	3.5
		PR programs	5	3.5
5.		PR principles	5	3.5
		PR programs	5	3.5
6-10 YEARS				
1.		Newswriting	11	7.8
2.		News editing	8	5.6
3.		PR lab	7	4.9
4.		PR media	9	6.3
5.		Case studies	6	4.2
11-15 YEARS				
1.		Newswriting	13	9.2
2.		News editing	9	6.3
3.		PR principles	6	4.2
4.		Case studies	8	5.6
5.		PR media	9	6.3
15+ YEARS				
1.		Newswriting	28	19.7
2.		News editing	16	11.3
3.		Newswriting	13	9.2
		PR principles	13	9.2
4.		PR programs	13	9.2
5.		PR lab	15	10.6

Business Course Rankings and
Respondents' Experience

When ranking the top business course, the number of

years of experience a respondent had was not a factor. Marketing was the top choice for all categories of experience. Management was the second most preferred course. Again, accounting was the last choice. Table XIX cross references practitioners' rankings of business courses by their experience.

TABLE XXIII
RANKING OF BUSINESS COURSES BY RESPONDENTS'
EXPERIENCE

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Experience</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>

0-5 YEARS				
1.		Marketing	17	12.0
2.		Management	14	9.9
3.		Finance	11	7.8
4.		Economics	8	5.6
		Finance	8	5.6
5.		Accounting	13	9.2
6-10 YEARS				
1.		Marketing	20	14.1
2.		Management	15	10.6
3.		Economics	8	5.6
4.		Finance	10	7.0
5.		Accounting	11	7.8
11-15 YEARS				
1.		Marketing	18	12.7
2.		Management	14	9.9
3.		Finance	9	6.3
4.		Economics	9	6.3
5.		Accounting	14	9.9
15+ YEARS				
1.		Marketing	24	16.9
2.		Management	26	18.3
3.		Economics	17	12.0
		Finance	17	12.0
4.		Finance	28	19.7
5.		Accounting	38	26.8

Extra-Curricular Activities Rankings
and Respondents' Experience

When ranking the top extra-curricular activities, the number of years of experience a respondent had was not a factor. An internship with a public relations organization was the top choice for all categories of experience except for those with 6-10 years of experience, which ranked it as second. Table XX cross references practitioners' rankings of extra-curricular activities by their experience.

TABLE XXIV
 RANKING OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY
 RESPONDENTS' EXPERIENCE

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Experience</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>

0-5 YEARS				
1.		PR intern	13	9.2
2.		Volunteer	10	7.0
3.		Volunteer	10	7.0
4.		PRSSA member	12	8.5
5.		Non-PR work	9	6.3
		Scholarships/grants	9	6.3
6-10 YEARS				
1.		PR internship	18	12.7
2.		Reporter	9	6.3
3.		Volunteer	10	7.0
4.		Non-PR work	7	4.9
		Volunteer	7	4.9
5.		Non-PR work	9	6.3
		PRSSA member	9	6.3
11-15 YEARS				
1.		Reporter	13	9.1
2.		PR internship	12	8.5
3.		PRSSA member	7	4.9
		Volunteer	7	4.9
4.		PRSSA member	7	4.9
5.		Scholarships/grants	11	7.8

TABLE XXIV (Continued)

15+ YEARS			
1.	PR internship	29	20.4
2.	Volunteer	21	14.8
3.	Reporter	20	14.1
4.	PRSSA member	16	11.3
5.	PRSSA member	20	14.1

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General

The Need for this Study

The Department of Labor has called public relations one of the most popular professions in the United States. By 1995, the Department estimates there will be over 125,000 practicing public relations specialists. Projections by the Public Relations Society of America have put the current figure of public relations specialists at 125,000 and the Society expects the field to grow to 150,000 or more over the next decade.

Public relations has never been an easy field to enter, especially right out of college. Corporations and agencies need entry-level employees, yet often expect such employees to be trained professionals, ready to contribute to their organization from day one. Employers would rather not have to spend precious time and money to train a public relations major fresh out of school. Such a burden undermines the educational system, and raises questions about the validity of a public relations

education program in the eyes of employers.

This study concentrated on those areas of skill/knowledge preferred and recommended by public relations employers. This study should benefit not only the undergraduate public relations student in helping to meet the demands for an employable applicant set forth by employers, but also the public relations educator as a curriculum guide.

Specifically, this study attempted to benefit those educators and students in the specified five-state region by giving them a sequence of skills/knowledge preferred by public relations practitioners in the same region. In addition to helping educators and students, this study gave employers the opportunity to share their views on what they expect of an entry-level applicant as well as a forum to voice their grievances against public relations education in hopes of bettering the quality of its graduates.

Summary of Study

The Participants

A mailed questionnaire was used to elicit responses from 200 Public Relations Society of America members in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Those members listed as professors, retired, or associate members were excluded from the

study. Participants were randomly drawn using a table of random numbers. The response rate for this study was 71 percent.

Of the respondents, almost one-third (32 percent) categorized themselves as corporate public relations professionals. Those who indicated that they worked for a public relations agency constituted 26 percent of the respondents. Other respondents indicated that they worked in non-profit (15 percent), education and other (9 percent each), business (5 percent), and government (4 percent).

Almost half of the respondents surveyed (44 percent) had earned a degree in print/broadcast journalism. The number of respondents who indicated they had earned a degree in the Other category was unexpectedly high (26 percent). Of those respondents in the Other category, almost half (43 percent) earned a degree in English. A public relations degree was the third most common degree earned among participants, with business ranked fourth.

Of the respondents, 46 percent said they had over 15 years of experience, 19 percent indicated they had between six and ten years of experience, 18 percent indicated they had between 11 and 15 years of experience, and 17 percent indicated they had between zero and five years of experience.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of six core questions asking participants to rank and rate the importance of courses and activities in three areas: (1) public relations courses, (2) business courses, (3) extra-curricular activities.

In addition to the rating of individual courses and activities, employers were also asked to rate the following when considering an applicant:

- 1.) The importance of an applicant's overall grade point average.
- 2.) The importance of an applicant's field-of-study grade point average.
- 3.) The importance of taking business courses or a minor in business.
- 4.) The overall usefulness or effectiveness of a college public relations degree (PRSA accredited) once in the real world.

Practitioners were asked to indicate the type of public relations organization they worked for as well as their educational background and years of experience in the public relations field. Practitioners were also asked whether or not their organization gives applicants an entrance exam to determine writing ability. The job title of the person responsible for hiring was also asked. A response rate of 71 percent was attained.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to determine which skills practitioners viewed as important for the undergraduate public relations major and to develop a list of the top course preferences of practitioners in the specified region. Another objective of this study was to determine which extra-curricular activities practitioners saw as important to augment course work.

Discussion of Findings

Preferred Public Relations Courses

Practitioners in this study, as well as in others, ranked newswriting as the top public relations course. The ability to effectively communicate is the number one skill employers look for in an undergraduate.

News editing was the second most preferred course for the public relations student. Judging from the results, practitioners feel the ability to write well must be coupled with a firm understanding of what is newsworthy and what is fluff. It is no longer enough to get a press release printed, the information given must be of relevance to the intended audience.

A public relations internship was ranked as the top choice for both the third and fifth highest ranked course. Practitioners saw the need for students to gain hands-on

experience as vital. Practitioners want students with practical work experience in addition to a strong theoretical background. If, in analyzing the data, the courses which had been previously ranked had been eliminated from consideration, then the fifth highest ranked course would have been a tie between Principles of Public Relations and Visual Communications.

Case Studies in Public Relations, Public Relations Media, and Public Relations Programs all tied for the fourth most preferred course. This emphasized the need for training in all aspects of public relations, from the inception of an idea or the identification of a problem, to the evaluation of the effectiveness of a program once administered.

Preferred Business Courses

Marketing was the overwhelming choice as the top business course for the public relations major. Public relations practitioners are no longer simply the vocal chords for a business. Public relations is now seen as an integral aspect of the entire marketing and management process.

Today, public relations must be able to justify itself and its efforts to upper management. In order to do so, practitioners must speak on managements' level, using their mind-set and concepts. Effective

communication entails more than succinct writing. To be effective, practitioners must be able to understand the management by objectives mentality and then devise a plan with which to disseminate the intended message to the targeted audience.

With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that management was chosen as the second most preferred business course. In fact, this study duplicated the preferences for business courses found in both The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education (1987) and the Fitzpatrick study (1982).

Preferred Extra-Curricular Activities

An internship was also chosen as the top preference for the listed extra-curricular activities. This preference, and the second choice, volunteer work with a public relations organization, again stresses the practitioners' desire for practical experience.

Although statistical analysis did not accurately reflect the rankings, practitioners saw the experience as a reporter to be an important extra-curricular activity for the budding public relations practitioner. Experience as a reporter was ranked as second or third behind the most preferred activity in each ranking category. If, in analyzing the data, the activities which had been previously mentioned had been eliminated from

consideration, the experience as a reporter would have been ranked as the third most preferred activity.

Practitioners were less than enthusiastic about student participation in Public Relations Student Society of America, non-public relations work, and the attainment of grants, scholarships and awards.

Practitioners felt not only the course content to be important, but also student performance. The importance of a student's grade point was rated high.

A total of 58 percent said their organization did not require applicants to take a writing exam. Forty-Two percent said their organization did require applicants to take a writing exam.

Conclusions

The results of this study were similar to those found in previous studies. Practitioners in this study indicated that fundamental newswriting skills should constitute the backbone of public relations training. In similar studies conducted by Cooper (1979), Bobo (1980), Fitzpatrick (1982), and O'Brien and Shelly (1983), all four found that the most preferred public relations course was newswriting.

News editing was seen as the second most preferred public relations course. This ranking came as a surprise when compared to other studies. In most previous studies,

editing skills were ranked as inferior to other more advanced aspects of public relations such as the development, execution and evaluation of programs. Perhaps this is an indication of the importance of not only a clear writing style, but also a sound sense of what constitutes news.

In this study, as with others, a public relations internship was also highly rated. While the Public Relations Society of America has made progress in promoting its Pro-Am (professional-amateur) program to accredited schools, allowing students a chance to intern with a professional, problems with demographics, availability, economics, and logistics can often hinder the successful functioning of an internship program. Until such problems are solved, undergraduates with internship experience may be the wish that goes unfulfilled for public relations employers.

Analysis and criticism of past public relations cases, the development and application of public relations programs, and experience in designing media messages were all seen as important aspects in public relations for the undergraduate public relations student to have been exposed to.

Both The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education (1987) and Fitzpatrick (1982) found marketing as the most important business course for the undergraduate

public relations student. In fact, the ranking of recommended business courses in the above studies exactly mirrored the business course rankings found in this study.

The rankings of extra-curricular activities were roughly as expected. It was anticipated that any prior public relations experience, be it an internship or volunteer work, would be at the top of the list. What was surprising was the seemingly ambivalent attitude practitioners had toward the importance of participation in Public Relations Student Society of America, the awarding of scholarships and grants, and work experience not directly related to public relations.

While by no means a completely accurate assumption, student performance in class is often used as an indicator to forecast how well a student will do in the work force. With this in mind, it is understandable why the importance of a student's grade point average was rated high, as was the perceived importance of business courses for the public relations student. From the ratings, it can be assumed that practitioners were more interested in course content and performance in public relations courses than in the attainment of a public relations degree.

Recommendations to Students and Educators

Students

Curriculum advice for students based on

practitioners' views in the region specified can be summarized in the following condensed recommendations.

Practitioners recommended that the aspiring public relations student should:

1. Develop a clear, concise writing style, placing equal importance on editing and news judgment skills,
2. Gain practical public relations experience through an internship or a job working for a public relations organization, even if as a volunteer,
3. Learn about the principles of marketing and business management and how such principles apply to the public relations practitioner, and if possible, minor in business,
4. Work as a reporter to enhance writing skills and to gain an inside view of how the media works and thinks.

Educators

Curriculum advice for educators based on practitioners' views in the region specified can be summarized in the following condensed recommendations.

Practitioners recommended that the public relations educator should:

1. Be aware that well developed writing skills are the single most important tool a public relations student can bring into the marketplace. Of near equal importance is a sound knowledge of editing and news judgment skills,
2. Try to overcome problems associated with internship programs and to develop ways for students to gain practical experience,
3. Understand the importance of business acumen for students, and stress the need for marketing

and management skills as they pertain to the realm of public relations,

4. Stress practical skills over theoretical concepts, encourage any activity which will give the student practical experience (i.e., reporter, speech writer, writing contests, etc.).

Recommendations for Future Study

While this study sought to determine those courses preferred by practitioners in public relations, business, and extra-curricular activities, it did not seek a comprehensive list of practitioner preferences of the top courses and activities in all combined areas. Such a study would allow the public relations student and educator alike to determine which courses are most important to future employers and how the student can better market himself.

This study excluded certain Public Relations Society of America members, namely those with less than two years of membership in Public Relations Society of America (including those with less than two to three years of experience since graduating), those members practicing in states other than the specified seven-state region, and those members who were listed as educators or retired practitioners. A similar study could be given to any or all of these excluded groups to compare their responses with those of the participants in this study.

While this study asked for practitioners' rankings

and ratings of specific courses, it did not answer the question of whether a public relations sequence meets the practical needs of practitioners. Such a study could solicit input from practitioners as to how to better the training of public relations undergraduates.

The focus of this study was on practitioners' views of undergraduate public relations education. A similar study could be conducted assessing practitioners' views of graduate level public relations education.

The public relations profession is ever-changing, as are the demands placed on public relations education. The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education was conducted in 1987. A study similar to the Commission's report on Undergraduate Public Relations Education could be conducted to update to the 1987 study and chart the changing course of public relations education.

Conclusion to this Study

For the undergraduate public relations student entering today's workforce, simply knowing the theoretical concepts of what public relations is and does is no longer enough. The aspiring practitioner must be able to put theory into motion. He must know how to administer a public relations program from its inception to its conclusion, including recommendations and evaluation.

Not only is the aspiring student expected to know how

this is done and preferably have had first-hand experience in its execution, but it must be well written and edited with practical implications for business inherent in its format.

From the results obtained in this study, the public relations practitioner wants a graduate to be short on theory and long on practical hands-on experience. Writing and editing skills should be well developed, as well as a basic knowledge of marketing and management techniques.

The hiring practitioner prefers a student with real world experience in the field of public relations, yet internships are unfortunately too few and far between. The prudent public relations student would be well advised to seek practical public relations experience anywhere he can.

Opportunities for gaining experience exist in, but are not limited to, departments or organizations such as the university student activities department, the local chamber of commerce, and various local and national non-profit organizations. Most organizations would welcome volunteer help provided the student is dependable and serious about gaining practical experience, rather than just looking for an activity to put on a resume.

Another source of valuable experience is the university or local newspaper. As the results from this study indicate, practitioners want applicants to have well

developed writing skills. Reporting for the university or community will not only allow the student to fine tune his writing skills, but will also give the student an idea of how the media operates and what is considered to be newsworthy.

The public relations student should not neglect the business aspect inherent in public relations, for the business of business is business. Business courses should constitute a large percentage of the student's curricular electives.

In short, the public relations practitioner wants an entry-level employee to have just enough theory to provide a basic understanding of the principles of business and public relations, and enough experience to be useful.

ENDNOTES

- 1
Allen H. Center and Scott M. Cutlip, Effective Public Relations (revised 5th ed., Englewood Cliffs, 1982), pp. 591-593.
- 2
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- 3
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- 5
Ibid.
- 6
Ibid., p. 3.
- 7
Ibid., p. 20.
- 8
A. Scott and S. Barker-Benfield, "What the Professionals Want," Forum (Fall 1971), p.8-11.
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Larry Marshall, "The New Breed of Public Relations Executive," Public Relations Journal (July 1980), p. 12.
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John D. Simpkins, "Theory, Strategy Get Priority" Journalism Educator (July 1976), p. 53.

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Gay Wakefield and Laura Perkins-Cottone, "Knowledge and Skills Required by Public Relations Employers," Public Relations Review (Fall 1987) p. 25.

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Barbara J. Cooper, "Attitudes Toward Public Relations Education: A Survey of Southern California Public Relations Practitioners" (unpub. M.S. thesis, California State University, 1979).

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Gary O'Brien and Michael B. Shelly, "PRSA, IABC Members Agree on Top Courses" Journalism Educator (Spring 1983), p. 20.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Barbara J. Cooper, "Attitudes Toward Public Relations Education: A Survey of Southern California Public Relations Practitioners" (unpub. M.S. thesis, California State University, 1979).

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Charles A. Labotka, "An Analysis of Graduate's Perceptions of Public Relations Education at Northern Illinois University Between the Years 1968-1975." (unpub. M.S. thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1977).

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Frank B. Kapula and T. Harell Allen, "Future Directions in Public Relations Education" Public Relations Review (Summer 1982), p. 37.

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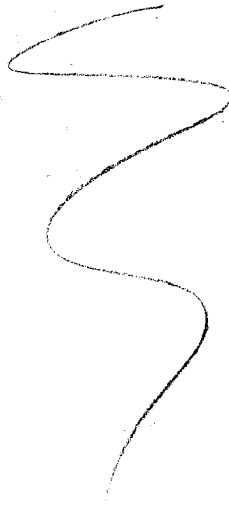
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APPENDIXES



APPENDIX A
COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

- CASE STUDIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS - Public relations publications planning, problem solving, management techniques, policies and case study analysis.
- MASS COMMUNICATION LAW - Study of mass communication law and ethics, FCC regulations and copyright/trademark restrictions.
- NEWS WRITING - Fundamentals of newsgathering, reporting and other information gathering techniques in the mass media.
- NEWS EDITING - Developing basic news judgment, copy editing, headline writing, stylebook usage and photo editing.
- PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS - Basic concepts, techniques and practice of public relations as a management function in business, industry, government, education, and nonprofit organizations.
- PUBLIC RELATIONS INTERNSHIP - Practical public relations experience beyond the classroom for students planning to enter the field of public relations.
- PUBLIC RELATIONS MEDIA - Practice in writing, editing and designing materials to be used for news and feature articles, pamphlets, speech ghostwriting and audio-visual presentations, bill inserts, displays, and annual reports.
- PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS - Development and application of public relations programs from the identification of the problem to the execution of the program and evaluation.
- VISUAL COMMUNICATION - Principles, techniques and mechanics of photographs, charts, graphs and other nonverbal communication in mass media.

BUSINESS COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

- ACCOUNTING - Principles of managerial accounting, planning and control of sales and costs as well as analysis.
- ECONOMICS - Elementary principles of price theory and national income theory developed with an emphasis on analyzing economic issues and for recommending economic policy.

FINANCE - Operational and strategic principles of finance including allocation of funds, asset management, financial information systems, financial structure and analysis.

MANAGEMENT - Decision making as applied to management systems, organizations, and interpersonal relationships.

MARKETING - Consumer behavior, marketing institutions, competition and the law.

APPENDIX B
PILOT STUDY COVER LETTER

Dear Public Relations Society of America Member:

It has been said that a profession has come of age when it concerns itself with education for that profession. This is an accurate description of the public relations profession today.

The enclosed survey is part of my thesis for the Master's degree in mass communications at Oklahoma State University. The intent of this survey is to determine what skills the public relations practitioner feels are necessary for an undergraduate public relations major to have upon graduation from a four-year Public Relations Society of America accredited program of study.

You have been randomly selected to analyze and critique the final draft in hopes to better the clarity and intent of my study. Your cooperation in completing the questionnaire and any additional comments you may have will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

David Blohm
Graduate student
Mass Communications
Oklahoma State
University

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like more information please contact me. My number is (405) 743-4504. Or if you would prefer to write, my address is:

David Blohm
201 South Burdick
Stillwater, OK 74074.

The purpose of this study can be confirmed by contacting:
Dr. Charles Fleming - Professor
Oklahoma State University
(405) 744-6354

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

Public Relations Areas of Skill/Knowledge
Deemed Important by Public Relations
Practitioners

Questionnaire

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the following questions concerning undergraduate public relations education according to the instructions given below. Included is a summary of the subject matter for each of the listed courses taught in each of the listed courses.

If you have any questions/comments, please contact me at:

David Blohm
201 S. Burdick
Stillwater, OK 74074
(405) 743-4504

1. RANK NUMERICALLY the TOP FIVE public relations courses listed below that you feel are important for an undergraduate public relations student to have taken.

For example: If you feel the course MASS COMMUNICATION LAW is the most important course listed, place a "1" beside that course offering. If you feel VISUAL COMMUNICATION is the fifth most important course listed, place a "5" beside that course offering. Please rank only five courses. See the attached course descriptions.

_____	CASE STUDIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
_____	MASS COMMUNICATION LAW
_____	NEWS EDITING
_____	NEWS WRITING
_____	PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
_____	PUBLIC RELATIONS LABORATORY/INTERNSHIP
_____	PUBLIC RELATIONS MEDIA
_____	PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS
_____	VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Please go to next page

2. RANK NUMERICALLY the following business courses listed below that you feel are important for an undergraduate public relations student to have taken.

For example: If you feel the course ACCOUNTING is the most important course listed, place a "1" beside that course offering. If you feel ECONOMICS is the fifth most important course listed, place a "5" beside that course offering. Please rank only five courses. See the attached course descriptions.

_____	ACCOUNTING
_____	ECONOMICS
_____	FINANCE
_____	MANAGEMENT
_____	MARKETING

3. RANK NUMERICALLY the TOP FIVE extra-curricular activities listed below that you feel are important for an undergraduate public relations student to have participated in.

For example: If you feel the activity PUBLIC RELATIONS INTERNSHIP is the most important activity listed, place a "1" beside that activity. If you feel the activity PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA MEMBER is the fifth most important activity listed, place a "5" beside that activity. Please rank only five activities. See the attached course descriptions.

_____	PUBLIC RELATIONS INTERNSHIP-not for course credit.
_____	NON-PUBLIC RELATIONS RELATED WORK.
_____	PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA MEMBER.
_____	REPORTER FOR SCHOOL PAPER, YEARBOOK OR RELATED EXPERIENCE.
_____	SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS, AWARDS (honor roll, etc.).
_____	VOLUNTEER WORK WITH A PUBLIC RELATIONS RELATED ORGANIZATION.

Please go to next page

4. Please rate the importance of each of the following PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES by placing an "X" along the continuum.

For example: If you feel the course NEWS EDITING is of neutral importance, place an "X" in the middle blank.

Not Important	_ _ _ _ _	Very Important	CASE STUDIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS MASS COMMUNICATION LAW NEWS EDITING NEWS WRITING PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PUBLIC RELATIONS LAB/INTERNSHIP PUBLIC RELATIONS MEDIA PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS VISUAL COMMUNICATION
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		

5. Please rate the importance of each of the following BUSINESS COURSES by placing an "X" along the continuum.

For example: If you feel the course ACCOUNTING is of neutral importance, place an "X" in the middle blank.

Not Important	_ _ _ _ _	Very Important	ACCOUNTING ECONOMICS FINANCE MANAGEMENT MARKETING
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		
	_ _ _ _ _		

Please go to next page

6. Please rate the importance of each of the following EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES by placing an "X" along the continuum.

For example: If you feel the activity PUBLIC RELATIONS RELATED WORK is of neutral importance, place an "X" in the middle blank.

Not Important	_ _ _ _ _	Very Important	
	_ _ _ _ _		PUBLIC RELATIONS INTERNSHIP-not for course credit.
	_ _ _ _ _		NON-PUBLIC RELATIONS RELATED WORK.
	_ _ _ _ _		PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA MEMBER.
	_ _ _ _ _		REPORTER FOR SCHOOL PAPER, YEARBOOK OR RELATED EXPERIENCE.
	_ _ _ _ _		SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS, AWARDS (honor roll, etc.).
	_ _ _ _ _		VOLUNTEER WORK WITH A PUBLIC RELATIONS RELATED ORGANIZATION.

Please go to next page

7. Please rate the importance of each of the following questions by placing an "X" along the continuum.

For example: If you feel the importance of an applicant's overall grade point average is of neutral importance, place an "X" in the middle blank.

Not Important	_ _ _ _ _	Very Important	
	_ _ _ _ _		The importance of an applicant's overall grade point average.
	_ _ _ _ _		The importance of an applicant's grade point average in public relations courses.
	_ _ _ _ _		The importance of taking business courses or a minor in business.
	_ _ _ _ _		The overall usefulness or effectiveness of a college public relations degree (PRSSA accredited) once in the "real world."

8. Please check the type of public relations organization you work for.

- Agency
- Non-profit
- Government
- Corporate
- Business
- Education
- Other (specify) _____

Please go to next page

APPENDIX D
INITIAL AND FOLLOW-UP COVER LETTERS

Dear Public Relations Society of America member,

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS?

Much debate surrounds the issue of how to best prepare undergraduate public relations students for a career in public relations.

As a graduate student at Oklahoma State University, I'm conducting a study of Public Relations Society of America members in the Southwest. The purpose of this study is to determine what skills you, a public relations employer, feel are necessary for an undergraduate public relations student to have upon graduation.

Would you do me a favor?

I hope to shed some light on this subject, but need your input. I would appreciate it if you would please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope.

You may notice a number on the envelope. The sole purpose of this number is to keep track of responses and help with a follow-up mailing if necessary. All answers to this questionnaire will be held in the strictest of confidence.

While the penny is just a small token of my appreciation, I'll thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

David Blohm

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like more information please contact me. My number is (405) 743-4504. Or if you would prefer to write, my address is:

David Blohm
201 South Burdick
Stillwater, OK 74074.

The purpose of this study can be confirmed by contacting:
Dr. Charles Fleming - Professor
Oklahoma State University
(405) 744-6354

Dear *Public Relations Society of America* member,

A few weeks ago I mailed you a letter and questionnaire concerning a study I am conducting. The purpose of my study is to determine how you, a public relations employer, feel about undergraduate public relations education.

Since I have not received your completed questionnaire, I am concerned that my first letter may not have reached you. I have enclosed another questionnaire and ask that you take a few minutes to complete and return it via the enclosed stamped envelope.

As I mentioned in my first letter, I hope to shed some light on this subject but need your input. The success of my study depends on you. While I realize how busy you must be, please take a few moments to complete and return the questionnaire.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire, I'll take this opportunity to thank you again for your time.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

David Blohm

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like more information, please contact me. My number is (405) 743-4504. Or if you would prefer to write, my address is:

David Blohm
201 South Burdick
Stillwater, OK 74074

The purpose of this study can be confirmed by contacting:
Dr. Charles Fleming - Professor
Oklahoma State University
(405) 744-6354

Dear Public Relations Society of America member,

Over the last few weeks I have mailed you two letters asking you to participate in a study I am conducting. The purpose of my study is to determine how you, a public relations employer, feel about undergraduate public relations education.

Since I have not received your completed questionnaire, I am concerned that my first two letters may not have reached you. I have enclosed another questionnaire and ask that you take a few minutes to complete and return it via the enclosed stamped envelope.

As I mentioned in my first two letters, I hope to shed some light on this subject but need your input. The success of my study depends on you. While I realize how busy you must be, please take a few moments to complete and return the questionnaire.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire, I'll take this opportunity to thank you again for your time.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

David Blohm

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like more information, please contact me. My number is (405) 743-4504. Or if you would prefer to write, my address is:

David Blohm
201 South Burdick
Stillwater, OK 74074

The purpose of this study can be confirmed by contacting:
Dr. Charles Fleming - Professor
Oklahoma State University
(405) 744-6354

VITA

David W. Blohm

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: A SURVEY OF EMPLOYER RATINGS OF COURSES OFFERED
AT MAJOR UNIVERSITIES IN ARKANSAS, COLORADO,
KANSAS, MISSOURI, NEW MEXICO, OKLAHOMA, AND TEXAS
IN THE P.R. DEGREE SEQUENCE AND OF CERTAIN NON-
ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES.

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, November 29,
1963, the son of Glenna Owens and Raymond
William Blohm.

Education: Graduated from Bishop Kelley High School,
Tulsa, in May 1982; received Bachelor of Science
Degree in Psychology from Oklahoma State
University at Stillwater in May 1987; completed
requirements for the Master of Science
degree at Oklahoma State University in December,
1989.

Professional Experience: Assistant News Editor, The
Daily O'Collegian, Oklahoma State University,
August to December, 1987; Member of Kappa Tau
Alpha, Honorary Journalism Society.