AGENDA-SETTING AND GATEKEEPING FUNCTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE COVERAGE OF TWO STATE INSTITUTIONS BY THE STATE'S TWO METROPOLITAN NEWSPAPERS

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Background

Image

One of the most important factors in an organization is image (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffitt, 2001). Image is defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of an object, place or thing and through which people describe, remember and relate to it (Kotler & Fox, 1995). The emphasis on institutional image has grown dramatically in the past 20 years, primarily because CEOs have come to understand that image is a vital component in maintaining the stability and vitality of the organization (Lemmink, Schuijf, & Steukens, 2003). With this in mind, many private and public organizations have focused a large portion of their attention and budget on perfecting their image.

Typically, the imaging process is managed and maintained, with the oversight of the marketing executive, by the public relations (PR) department or individual within an organization. Until recently, higher education had no need to be concerned about image and therefore public relations had no significant role at the university (Grossman, 1987). In addition, the culture of the university viewed marketing and PR as being unprofessional and in some cases, immoral (Bingham, 1988). However, in a study conducted by Sevier (1994), high school and first-year college students cited four reasons why they choose a particular institution to attend. The first choice was invariably image. Ivy (2001) stated, "It is the university's perceived excellence which guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars considering offers of employment, and federal agencies awarding grants" (p. 276). Over the past decade problems plaguing universities such as rising tuition costs, scandals, and academic quality concerns have forced administrators to acknowledge a need for a strong positive public image (Jonsen, 1984), making PR a core element of university administrative functions (Lindsey, 1988).

Public Relations

As a university managerial function, the role of PR is to establish and to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and the publics on whom its success and failures depend (Cutlip, 1995). The university's success depends heavily on the reciprocal relationship between the institution and its donors, students, community, and alumni. The institution's image is one of the main factors in maintaining a beneficial relationship with its constituents. The responsibility of maintaining this image lies with the PR practitioner, who has also traditionally been called PR officer, PR writer, media relations officer, public affairs officer, public information officer, and community relations officer.

The PR practitioner can have a profound effect on the institution's ability to acquire financial support, increase student enrollment and garner research grants (Theus, 1993) by maintaining a positive image with the public in the media. Of the numerous PR methods, it is very important that the PR practitioner is skilled in the area of media relations and is effective in obtaining positive and plentiful news coverage for the university. To this end the PR practitioners must find the most effective media vehicle to shape the public's perception of the institution. PR practitioners describe the newspaper as essential in this function (Dowling, 1996).

The Press Release

The most popular PR method used for obtaining coverage in the newspaper is the press release. The press release is simply a document written by PR personnel in the form of a news story about a company or institution and delivered to the media for publication or broadcast. The press release has been a valuable PR tool since the colonial period (Warner, 1976). Studies have indicated that anywhere from 25% to nearly 80% of press releases sent to a local newspaper, depending on size of the paper, were used as news stories (Stegall, 1985).

The delivery method of the press releases has been mainly through mail and fax, which are still the most preferred method of delivery by the media (Cantelmo, 2001); however, with electronic mail, the e-press release has surfaced as a useful and convenient method for PR practitioners deliver their stories to the newspaper (Zoulas, 2001). Rising budgetary problems have forced many universities to cut back on PR expenditures; therefore, putting a strain on PR efforts. But most institutions have managed to continue to mold the university's image despite scarce resources by focusing efforts on publicity obtained via press releases (Kelley, 2000). The free publicity received in the newspaper via the press release is invaluable to the university in building a positive pubic image.

Research Problem

The PR departments of higher education institutions have a responsibility to maintain a strong institutional public image. It is, after all, the image that will impact a student's willingness to apply to that institution for enrollment, or a donor's consideration of an endowment, or a company's selection of an institution to do contracted research and development (Bok, 1990; Ivy, 2001; Phair, 1992). Therefore, it is essential that the university leaders have a clear understanding of the role that the mass media play in creating the institutional image and the PR methods that are the most effective in achieving this outcome.

This study, therefore, examined the PR processes used by the two state research universities in conjunction with the two state metropolitan newspapers in shaping the public's image. More specifically, the study investigated the amount and nature of news coverage about higher education and the criteria used by the newspapers' higher education writers in deciding what gets published about the universities.

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical models used in this study are the agenda-setting theory and the gatekeeping theory.

Agenda-Setting Theory

The media is an effective tool in setting the agenda for the public. In 1963, Bernard Cohen suggested that the media doesn't tell the public what to think, but was "stunningly successful in telling people what to think about" (p. 13). DeFleur and Ball-

Rockeach (1989) suggested that the "agenda of the press did become the agenda of the public" (p. 264). Those who set the agenda in the press originate from various areas in the media. Wilbur Schramm (1982) described the agenda-setter as editors, producers and writers in the media. Cobb and Elder (1972) suggested PR writers played an important role in setting the agenda in the media as well. As a PR practitioner, a main PR function is shaping the media's content to mold the public's agenda (Bollinger, 2001). In this study, the PR practitioner was examined as the agenda-setter.

The press release is a widely acceptable PR method in shaping news content (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanhan, 2002). The information is then distributed to the public through the media. Dowling (1996) concluded that the transmission of information through the press release to be the most effective. He added that the newspaper was one of the most widely used delivery vehicles for public relations. Studies applying the agenda-setting concept found the newspaper to be a very effective media form in setting the public's agenda. Shaw and McCombs (1977) found evidence that suggested newspapers play an important role in "shaping our society's reality" (p. 5). In another study, Cobb and Elder (1972) looked closely at the agenda-setting concept and concluded that the conditioning of the public of particular issues in newspapers is a widely accepted method by the public information writer. This study examined the PR processes used by the university to set the public agenda in the state.

Gatekeeping Theory

Once the information from the PR department reaches the media, the role of gatekeeper comes into play. Straubhaar and LaRose (2002) simply described gatekeepers as those who decide what will be in the media. Shoemaker et al. (2001) defined the gatekeeping process as how potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are actually transmitted by the news media to the public.

The theory of gatekeeping is one of the oldest in the field of mass communication research. Psychologist Kurt Lewin first proposed a gatekeeping process in his post–World War II research on social change (Shoemaker, Eicholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). In a 1950 study, David Manning White applied the gatekeeping theory to the media and found that each news story must pass through a series of gates before it is printed. The newspapers editors, reporters, and writers were described as gatekeepers.

According to Dimmick (1974), editors determine the news content for newspapers through their role as gatekeepers. However, scholars have suggested the writer has a great degree of latitude in determining story content (Fisherman, 1980; Ratcliff 1996). As a gatekeeper, each writer makes news selection decisions based on a list of posed criteria when accessing whether a story gets printed, edited, or discarded (Donahue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1972). The criteria for selecting the news will not always be the same at every media outlet. According to Donahue et al. (1972), the gatekeeping process is a complex set of subjective rules and practices used by the journalism industry. They added that one must include how messages are shaped, how it will be timed for dissemination, as well as the length, level of editing, placement in the paper, and number of column inches. This study examined higher education newspaper writers in their roles as gatekeepers through investigating the criteria higher education writers use in determining coverage of the university.

Purpose of the Study

This study has provides better understanding of which PR methods are used, preferred, and effective in setting the public's agenda in regards to the university. By examining the selection criteria of the two metropolitan newspapers, university PR practitioners can better understand the newspaper writer's decision-making process and ultimately become more effective in obtaining positive news coverage. An analysis of the existing newspaper coverage can help quantify and describe the media content in terms of the tone, type, and amount of news coverage garnered by the two universities; therefore, allowing the PR departments to better evaluate how they are covered. In addition, the outcome of the study can help university administrators and PR personnel communicate with the newspapers about higher education issues more effectively.

Research Questions

1. What PR delivery methods do the two state research universities use to communicate to the two state metropolitan newspapers?

2. What are the university's most effective PR delivery method(s) in gaining access to the newspaper?

3. What criteria do the newspaper higher education writers use when deciding whether a press release from the university PR department gets printed?

4. How does the relationship between the university PR departments and the newspapers affect the news coverage of the two schools?

5. Is the news coverage of the two institutions favorable, unfavorable or neutral in nature?

6. What type of story did the two newspapers cover more frequently in regards to the two state institutions?

7. Is there a difference in the amount of coverage devoted to the two state institutions by the two state newspapers?

Methodology

The Qualitative Approach: Open-Ended Questionnaire

The first phase of the study used an open-ended questionnaire administered to the PR practitioners and the newspaper higher education writers. This method allows a great deal of information to be collected easily and cost effectively in regards to attitudes, conditions, and relationships (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Each subject received an identification number to maintain confidentiality and to assist the investigator in identifying the participants. The questionnaire consisted of a brief explanation of the study, followed by 27 open-ended questions, which were delivered via e-mail.

The Quantitative Approach: Content Analysis

The second phase of the study utilized a systematic analysis of content of the two state newspapers regarding their coverage of the two state research institutions. A content analysis was used because it is one of the most popular and widely used media research methods in studying newspaper content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

The newspapers chosen for this study were the major metropolitan newspapers in the state, each with a circulation of over 150,000 and were analyzed from January 1, 1998, to December 31, 2002. A two-dimensional chi-square was used to identify significant differences in the tone of coverage, type of coverage and the amount of coverage attributed to the two universities by the two newspapers. Two coders were trained to provide systematic coding of content according to the study variables. Intercoder reliability (Holsi, 1969) checks were made on a weekly sample.

Importance of the Study

Although significant research into image has been established in all fields of commercial communication, relatively less image research has been conducted on service-oriented organizations such as churches, hospitals, and, especially, universities (Kazoleas et. al., 2001). Therefore, this study contributes to the body of knowledge relating to image, specifically the agenda-setting and gatekeeping functions in higher education newspaper coverage.

This study benefits university PR departments by identifying the most salient PR delivery methods and criterion used in selecting stories for print. The quantitative approach brings forth information that is of great value and interest to the university PR departments. This study provides an understanding about how the university image is shaped through analysis of the tone, type, and amount of coverage in the newspaper of the university.

By examining the past newspaper coverage from the two state metropolitan newspapers of the two state institutions, newspapers, university administration, and PR staff can become better acquainted with possible patterns and trends that may have developed over the past several years in the coverage of higher education in the state. This study also may help improve communication between the universities and newspapers by providing better understanding of one another's role and function.

Finally, the study contributes to the higher education literature by further examining the processes use by the PR practitioner and the higher education writer in building university image.

Scope and Limitations

The limitations of this study include the following:

1. The university PR practitioners and newspaper higher education writers questioned might have been hesitant in revealing their "secrets" in regards to the methods they utilize in their professions.

2. The researcher's professional media background might have affected the perceptions, meanings, and other data collected in the qualitative phase.

3. The researcher presumed the professional relationship between the two newspapers and universities is amicable, and that there is no resentment between the two entities that may have affected results.

4. The open-ended questionnaire is an individual design; therefore the qualitative phase of the study might not reflect or produce the same results as those of other researchers attempting to replicate the study.

5. The content analysis is purely descriptive and from the findings one cannot make statements about the effects of coverage on the audience nor its role in shaping institutional image.

6. The content analysis is limited to the framework of the categories and the definitions designed in the study; therefore, a replicated study may not produce the same results.

Outline of the Study

The introductory chapter describes the basis for the study. This chapter contains the general information, background, statement of the problem, purpose statement, hypotheses and research questions, both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies, theoretical framework, significance of the study, and the scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a history of public relations in higher education and the literature in the area of the agenda-setting function and gatekeeping concept. The chapter also includes the current literature and studies relating to the mentioned concepts as well as the need for the study.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used in the study and the procedure and reasons for selecting the schools and newspapers in this study. The chapter also includes the study designs, data collection methods, analysis of data, coding, and time frame relating to the methodologies in this study.

Chapter 4 discusses the results received from the questionnaire distributed to the two university PR practitioners and two metropolitan newspapers higher education writers and the findings of the content analysis.

Chapter 5 consists of the summary, conclusion, limitations, and recommendations for further studies based on the data collected from the qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter is composed of six parts. The sections include (a) higher education and image, (b) the history of public relations in higher education, (c) the role of PR as the agenda setter, (d) the relationship between the newspaper and the PR practitioner, (e) the gatekeeping functions of the newspaper, and (f) higher education and the newspaper.

The study of the relationship between the university PR practitioner and the newspaper writer is fairly new; therefore the literature is limited (Kelley, 2000). Most of the studies identified in this review date from the 1970s through the 1990s. The literature was collected from *Dissertation International Abstract, Masters International Abstract,* and *Digital Dissertation* published by *UMI.* Other resources included the Educational Resource Information Resource (ERIC), *UMI ProQuest*, the Expanded Academic Index database, and the researcher's personal library collection. Most of the issues relating to PR were gathered from the *Public Relations Review, Public Relations Quarterly, Journalism of Communications, Journalism Quarterly,* and *Public Relations Research.*

Higher Education and Image

Although an abundance of research has been conducted on corporate image, less can be found on nonprofit organizations such as churches, hospitals, and, especially, universities (Kazoleas et al., 2001). One reason for the limited amount of research dealing with higher education image is that university administrators did not put an emphasis on institutional image until enrollments began declining in the 1970s (Gaither, 1979). Since then, university administrators have focused more attention and resources on the development of institutional image. In a survey conducted with university communication administrators, Bobbitt (1996) found image building, along with student recruiting, as one of the major PR functions of the institution.

Image plays a critical role in the attitudes associated with the institution, having an impact on the longevity and reputation of the university. Shrinkage in students, alumni members, funds, and other resources has reminded community colleges and private and public universities of their dependence on the public marketplace (Kotler, 1982).

A favorable image plays an important role in fostering institutional growth. Paramewaran and Glowacka (1995), in their study of university image, found that higher education institutions need to maintain or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market. Grunde (1976) stated that an unclear, inaccurate, or negative image poses a considerable threat to any institution's success.

It is vital that the PR practitioner have an understanding of the image being projected to the public. Image is generally communicated through multiple channels: word of mouth, various media formats, and personal contacts, which inevitably create multiple public images of the college (Bok, 1990; Cowles, 1991; Ivy, 2001; Kazloeas et al., 2001; Theus, 1993). Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) suggested image is derived from "individual experiences with an organization and from the processing of information on the attributes that constitute functional indicators of image" (p. 303). Institutional image is, therefore, the result of an aggregate process by which the public compares and contrasts the various attributes of an organization.

However, the characteristics attributed to image by one's individual experiences are not necessarily accurate associations. Kotler (1982) suggested that the "observed organizational image is not necessarily its reality, that people respond to" (p. 56). In Cowles' (1991) study of the community college image, she wrote,

> Both shaping and changing an image are difficult tasks. The challenges associated with image management is in part a result of the complexity, as well as the fact that key publics (e.g., high school students, parents, business leaders) infrequently experience the schools via direct contact. These factors, in conjunction with a diverse mission, make it difficult both for consumers to develop an accurate image of a community college and for a school to arrive at a clear understanding of its position in any given marketplace. (p. 21)

Because multiple communication channels are involved in the imaging process, it is impossible for the PR practitioner to control all the perceived images being distributed to the public. However, the PR practitioner does have the ability to shape the public's image through the manipulation of the media. First, for the university to engage in a successful imaging campaign, the institution must be in touch with its targeted publics' perceptions. As noted, university administrators and PR practitioners must recognize and understand that the university has multiple images that are disseminated through the numerous events, media outlets, disciplines, and individuals connected to the institution (Kazoleas et al., 2001). Kotler (1982) reminded nonprofit organizations that the "desired image must be feasible in terms of the organization's present reality and resources" (p. 61) in the community. If, for example, the image is one of low quality or lack of service, then the organization must change the quality of the market offering or increase the level of service to allow people to begin to change their opinions about an image. Therefore, college administrators must first decide on the preferred image (i.e., what image they want each targeted segment or relevant public to have of the school).

In addition to understanding the audience, the institution must know itself. Cowles (1991) suggested that university decision makers develop an understanding of the school's current image through an ongoing program of research. Ivy (2001) stated that higher education institutions must understand the image that they portray and make sure that the image is both an accurate and favorable reflection of the institution.

Once these areas are understood and a PR strategy is in place, the university PR department will be more effective in shaping the public's perception of the university image. To understand the role of the university PR practitioner, the history of PR in higher education is discussed in the following section.

The History of Public Relations in Higher Education

The 17th Century to the Late 19th Century

Public relations has played a significant role in the establishment and success of the university. Though difficult to find the exact period PR functions began at the university, most of the literature has suggested the earliest form of PR in higher education was found at the birth of Harvard College in 1641. Historian Samuel Eliot Morrison described a "begging mission," in which three preachers visited England to conduct a fundraising campaign for the financially strapped college. Upon arrival, they found they needed some fundraising materials; they contacted Boston and received in 1643 what became the first higher education PR brochure and pamphlet (Warner, 1996; Woodress, 1976).

At that time, the university president bore the responsibility for PR efforts (Warner, 1996). According to Kinnison (1977), the American college president depended heavily on public opinion, therefore put great emphasis on the legitimizing of the American university by using various PR methods. Some of the methods included catalogues, letters, and administrative reports (Kelley, 2000). One of the first PR exercises performed by a university president was the 1758 King's College (now Columbia University) commencement, in which the president's confirmation of degrees was purely for publicity purposes (Cutlip, 1995; Woodress, 1976). The president of King's College also authorized the first recorded press release used in higher education (Baskin & Aronoff, 1992).

By the early 19th century, the growth of the American university brought a need to better publicize its image to the public (Warner, 1996). In 1825, Harvard published its annual reports, which the press generally ignored (Fine, 1941). However, this did not discourage the leaders of higher education. Harvard President Charles W. Eliot addressed the issue of public image in his 1869 inaugural address, suggesting that the university president must be sensitive to public opinion and have the ability to address higher education problems effectively with the public (Cutlip, 1970).

University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper was another leader who understood the importance of publicity for the institution. Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, was well known for his keen use of publicity and public opinion in garnering support for university projects (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994).

With his philosophy embedded deeply in practice, Harper established three branches at the University of Chicago: the university proper, the university extension, and the university press (Kelley, 2000). The latter two assisted in the dissemination of information to the public (Kelley). Following Harper's lead, other university presidents began conscious efforts to develop and enhance the university's public image (Warner, 1996) via organized communication with external audiences.

Social and technological movements in the mid- to late 19th century changed the landscape of higher education (Bernays, 1952). The increased public interest in attending college after the Civil War affected higher education in two ways: increased pressure on institutions to compete for freshmen and an increased number of newspapers in the country. Warner (1996) suggested that colleges were able to effectively utilize the press through articles and advertisements during this period. As a result, newspapers began covering colleges and universities more often, and a few even developed education departments. Unfortunately, costs became problematic, and newspapers cut back on providing coverage. This action by newspapers spurred a rapid response by colleges and universities to create news bureaus, which were essentially extensions of the PR department (Bonfiglio, 1990).

The 20th Century

By 1900, many Ivy League schools provided the first models of so-called publicity offices to perform the institution's PR functions. Kotler and Fox (1995) noted that Harvard, Yale, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Wisconsin had well-established PR offices in the first decade of the 20th century. Both the

University of Kansas and Southwestern University claim 1900 as the date of origin of their publicity offices, according to Walters (1941). By 1908, universities and other nonprofit groups such as churches and hospitals were using PR specialists on a routine basis (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983).

The objectives of PR in higher education during this period included maintaining goodwill with the public, adding to the reputation of the institution, and establishing the place of the university in the community (Bonfiglio, 1990). Cutlip (1971) noted that, during this period, the entire university was involved in the process of publicizing the institution. College presidents called upon faculty members to send out a rare news release, and students working as news correspondents dispatched news releases to the newspapers. Eventually, PR evolved and PR practitioners began adopting the responsibilities that were once rooted in the functions of the president (Rydell, 1971).

The growth of university PR news bureaus slowly increased from 1900 to 1919; by 1929, 84 bureaus were in existence (Warner, 1996). Fine (1941) suggested that universities developed institutional PR bureaus as a response to competition with other fund-raising organizations rather than as a result of their desire to keep the public in touch with their purposes and activities; the university was merely "jumping on the bandwagon." During the 1920s, university and college publicity offices were known as public relations or public affairs (Mulnix, 1996). Subsequently, over the years, other names were created for public relations, such as community relations, institutional advancement, university and college relations, university news bureau, and marketing (Bonfiglio, 1990).

The Post-War Era

The greatest advancement in the field came after World War II when the university experienced a "big boom in public relation problems and programs" (Cutlip & Center, 1952). During the 1920s and 1930s, the university was socially detached from most citizens, but in the mid- to late 1940s nearly half of all graduating high school students sought some level of higher learning, which made the university the major social institution it is today (Mulnix, 1996). Consequently, by the mid-1950s universities saw a significant increase in enrollment, forcing them to develop more infrastructure and programs. To accommodate the demands of increased enrollment, universities conducted intense PR campaigns out of financial necessity (Warner, 1996). To help garner support from the public, government, and alumni sectors, university PR units multiplied across the country (Mulnix).

The large enrollments and healthy budgets in the 1950s gave a false confidence to many university presidents and administrators (Mulnix, 1996). The innocence and relative idealism that the university was able to maintain in the late 1940s and 1950s was shattered in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the nation divided on a number of educational issues and the Vietnam War (Wherry, 1982). Again, PR was thrust to the forefront to tackle public image problems that were unparalleled in the history of higher education during this tumultuous period (Cutlip & Center, 1971). Despite the turmoil the American university experienced in the 1960s, PR offices on campuses flourished. The American College Public Relations Association boasted a membership of 1,244 institutions and 3,650 men and women who were professionals responsible for their institutions' PR, financial support, and development programs (Warner, 1996).

The Current Role of Public Relations

By the mid- to late 1970s, higher education's golden era, unquestioned public support and institution stability was ubiquitous (Grossman, 1987). However, confidence in the university was waning quickly. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, declining enrollment, public criticism of higher education, and financial problems were having a major impact on the university; therefore the need to foster public confidence was at a high level (Kelley, 2000). University administrators realized that PR was going to have an important role in maintaining a positive public image of the institution (Jonsen, 1984). Bonfiglio (1990) found the problem to be so profound that the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, which was the new organization for university and college PR officers, started a formal PR campaign for the higher education community. The sole purpose of the campaign was to promote confidence in higher education. In the end, the support was there; 1,000 institutions agreed that promoting public confidence in higher education was a main priority (Kelley).

By the late 1980s and through the 1990s, university administrators saw PR as a necessity to the institution's image and success (Jonsen, 1984). Most of the focus for higher education was on promoting new programs designed to meet the increased demands of nontraditional students, curriculum to attract traditional students, and financial support from alumni and state appropriations (Mulnix, 1996). In a study of the educational implications of technology, Lindsey (1988) indicated that well-coordinated, highly visible PR efforts have had a positive impact on the state budgets, school recruitment, and state financial aid for students at all educational levels. By the mid

1990s, PR had evolved into a major contributor to the American university's success. The number of members in the national organization of PR for higher education had grown from 135 in 1929 to 14,000 in 1994 (Warner, 1996).

By the 21st century, the university PR responsibilities and functions expanded to include areas such as alumni relations, fund raising, and government relations (Kelley, 2000). Under this umbrella, an effective university PR program is expected to tell external audiences how to think about a matter, plan effective strategies to achieve this goal, and execute them successfully (Lesly, 1983). An essential communication outlet in shaping the public's image is the use of the media (Kelley).

Public Relations: The Agenda Setter

The agenda-setting theory is one of the few concepts that has emerged solely from mass communication research and is one of the most widely used (Chaffee, 1996). Agenda setting was used initially to study the news media and how they shape what people think about public issues. Recently, agenda-setting theory has been applied to show how outside sources influence media content (Preston, 1998).

The concept has been a mainstay in the social sciences for nearly 35 years. Success of a theory generally can be measured by the continual generation of new questions and avenues that are opened by intellectual inquiry (Conant, 1951). In a 25-year span, from the time McCombs and Shaw conducted the first systematic study on agenda setting in 1968, over 200 articles have been published in social science literature about the agenda-setting theory (Rogers, Dearing, & Bregman, 1993).

In its simplest form, agenda setting is described as the "importance given in the media to issues and the order of significance attached to the same issues by the public" (Mc Quail, 1994, p. 256). For years, scholars have known that the media have the potential for structuring issues for the public (Littlejohn, 1992). As early as 1922, Walter Lippman began developing the roots to this theory. Though the concept was not coined the "agenda-setting theory" until 1972 by Shaw and McCombs, Lippman's book *Public Opinion* asserted that an individual's reality of the world was derived largely from what that individual consumed in the media. This is partly because the media only show part of the picture, which Lippman described as a pseudo-environment (Littlejohn, 1992). Lippmann concluded that people act not on what is truly taking place or has occurred, but based on the depictions provided by the media (as cited in DeFleur & Ball-Rockeach, 1989).

By the 1960s, the agenda-setting concept became more systematic and an effective research tool. In 1963, Bernard Cohen announced that the media was "didn't tell people what to think but what to think about" (p. 13).

To test Lippman and Cohen's assertions, Shaw and McCombs (1977) conducted the first systematic study using the agenda-setting function. In their classic study of the 1968 presidential election campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, they hypothesized that news media coverage of the presidential candidates and the issues that were associated with them would become the public's agenda. Through a content analysis of the main mass media that were reporting the presidential campaign and a survey of 100 undecided voters, Shaw and McCombs found the most salient issues that the public attributed to the candidates were the same issues that were heavily reported in the media, concluding that the media's agenda was highly correlated with the public's agenda (Rogers et al., 1993).

After conducting research of the 1976 presidential elections, Shaw and McCombs (1977) further explained that the media attention toward stories is the most important factor involved in shaping the public's view of the stories' relative importance. In addition, they suggested the exposure of the news on the audience, as well as other sources such as friends, family, and other voters, created an image of each political candidate. McCombs and Shaw (1993) called this "an agenda of attributes" (p. 62). DeFleur and Ball-Rockeach (1989) in their analysis of Shaw and McCombs work, explained that the "agenda of the press did become the agenda of the public" (p. 264).

Numerous studies of the agenda-setting theory and the media have demonstrated that the media have the ability to tell the public what to think about, through the process described as the agenda-setting function. However, McCombs and Shaw (1993) have suggested that new research has extended the agenda-setting function of the press from "telling us what to think about" to "also how to think about it and, consequently, what to think" (p. 65). For this phenomenon to occur, McCombs and Shaw observed three process areas: media agenda setting, public agenda setting, and policy agenda setting.

The Media Agenda-Setting Process

The media agenda-setting process reflects on the media content relating to "issue definition, selection, and emphasis" (Kosicki, 1993, p. 101). In other words, the media interpret reality to the public through their respective channels. Shaw and McCombs (1993) suggested that what became the media's agenda became the public's agenda.

The Public Agenda-Setting Process

The public agenda-setting process focuses on the link between issues as portrayed in mass media content and the issue priorities of the public (Kosicki, 1993). Shaw and McCombs' 1968 presidential election study was an example of this tenet, in which the media's agenda of the candidate's issues became the salient election issues for the public.

The Policy Agenda-Setting Process

The final step in the process of the agenda-setting theory is the policy agenda-setting process. The studies in this area are concerned with the issue agenda of "public bodies or elected officials, or those focusing on issues in the legislative arena and their connections to the media content or procedures" (Kosicki, 1993, p. 101). Shaw and McCombs (1993) suggested that the media's agenda also became the social and political issues of the state and federal lawmakers' agenda.

Influencing each of these defined areas of the agenda-setting model is vital for an effective use of the media to impact public opinion and policy. As depicted in Figure 1, agenda setting posits that the media, government, and society reciprocally influence one another.

As agenda-setters, PR practitioners have many goals, and to achieve them, they use a variety of communication methods to target opinion leaders such as government officials, policymakers, the public, and the media. The techniques vary in each campaign in relation to the targeted audience; however, the main goal is to manipulate the media content (Bollinger, 2001). The following section examines how PR practitioners attempt to influence the content of the media and tactics used in setting the agenda.

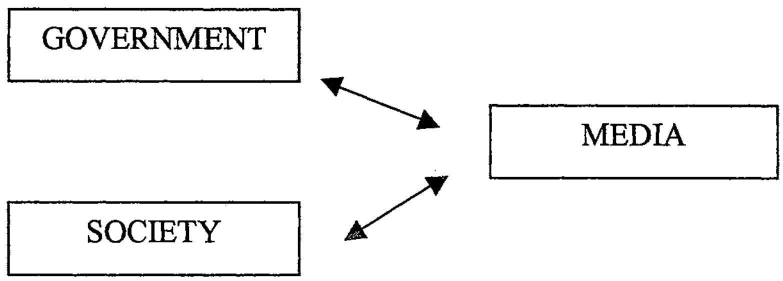

Figure 1. The reciprocal model of the agenda-setting model.

Public Relations: Shaping the Public Image

As noted, numerous studies have been conducted examining the influence the media have on the public. This section addresses the nonmedia agents that persuade the content of the media: specifically, PR officers, public affairs officers, public information officers, and PR writers. These titles are commonly used to identify the position of PR practitioner. Cobb and Elder (1972) looked closely at the agenda-setting concept and concluded that the conditioning of the public of particular issues in newspapers is a widely accepted method by the PR practitioner. Furthermore, the different perspectives and backgrounds of these professionals have an influence on the angle they take in the news. The most widely used method to gain press coverage is the press release (Minnis, 1995; Preston, 1998).

The main objective of the press release is to affect the content in the media (Bollinger, 2001; Minnis, 1995). The press release is one of the oldest PR functions. The first use of a press release was recorded in the mid-eighteenth century (Baskin &

Aronoff, 1992). Since then, an abundance of press releases have been written and distributed to the media, government, and the public directly. Despite the volume and popularity of press releases, research quantifying their success rate in gaining media coverage has been conflicting (Kelley, 2000).

As noted, Aronoff (1983) found that nearly 50% of the press releases sent to newspapers were used as news stories. Some studies have indicated the use to be high as 80% (Turow, 1989). De Semir, Ribas, and Revuelta (1998) conducted a study to assess whether press releases about scientific journal articles were associated with publication of subsequent newspaper scientific news stories. They reported that of the 1,060 newspaper scientific news stories analyzed, 142 referred to scientific journal articles; of these, 119 (84%) referred to articles mentioned in press releases, and 23 (16%) referred to journal articles not mentioned in press releases.

However, smaller percentages have been cited in the literature. Morton and Warren (1992) cited research suggesting that only 3% to 8% of press releases are used. More recently, Morton and Ramsey (1994) found that the newspaper circulation had a significant impact on the number of releases used: Smaller newspapers tended to publish more releases than did the larger newspapers. In an earlier study, Morton (1986) found that weekly newspapers published only 9% of all releases received, and biweeklies published only 21.6%. Many PR practitioners have sought various methods in increasing the use of the press release by the newspaper, but most researchers agree the issue is complex.

The Well-Prepared Press Release

The PR practitioner's understanding of how to write more effective press releases increases the chances of those releases being published. The press release is the most widely used and important communication tool available to the PR practitioner (Ramsey, 1993). However, the common criticism of newspaper reporters is that the press release is not correctly written for print (Aronoff, 1975). The PR practitioner must have knowledge of newspaper writing style and understand what the newspaper wants and looks for when deciding whether to print the press release. It is very helpful if the PR practitioner has had experience in the newspaper field so that they better understand the factors determining whether or not a press release is published (Covington, Esrock, Harman, & Stebbins, 1995). Bobbit (1996), in a survey of communication administrators at large and small, private and public, and metropolitan and rural universities, found that 39.5% of the respondents had journalism backgrounds. More PR practitioners have journalism backgrounds today then ever before (Kelley, 2000).

According to many studies, the success of the press release placement has much to do with the content. Morton and Ramsey (1994) analyzed 129 national releases from one day's transmission on the PR News Wire and traced their publication throughout nine major newspapers. They found that only content was significantly related to use. Of the subject matter published, financial disclosure was the most used. They also found a significant difference among the newspapers by use. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* used information from 17 releases. The newspaper with the second highest usage, *The New York Times*, used information from 4 releases.

How the press release is presented is also a factor in gaining coverage. In Minnis' (1995) study, he found that the newspapers coded "well-prepared" press releases as among the top three reasons for selecting releases. Williams (1994) stated that the reason most press releases are not used is the PR practitioner did not write from a "newsman's point of view" (p. 5). In other words, press releases should be written like a new story-clear, and concise, and consisting of short sentences and phrases; following the same tenets used by reporters.

Another method to help with the success of the press release is the way it is packaged. Cantelmo (2001) found in his experiences that press releases often were packaged with free items such as carry bags, pens, calendars, and mouse pads. He added that most in the media who received the creative packaging appreciated it. Pawniska (2001) found that one of the most effective ways to package a press release is to use some kind of gimmick to draw the attention of the journalists. She added, when "used intelligently and creatively they are an excellent way to enhance interest" (p. 33).

Finally, the press release must be localized. Minnis (1995) found taking a local angle on a story to be the most effective factor in getting a press release published. However, no matter how local the press release, timeliness also plays a large role in getting the releases in the media. If the press release is local but not received in a timely manner, the press release most likely will end up in the trash (De Semir et al., 1998).

The Delivery Method

The PR practitioner realizes that the success of the press release depends not only on how it is written, but also on the delivery method used to disseminate the information.

Zoulas (2001) suggested many universities have turned to e-mail to distribute their press releases. He added that the technology allows the PR practitioner to send the message directly to the intended newspaper writer, is less expensive, and is preferred by many newspaper writers. Using e-mail also keeps the number of people with access to the press release to a minimum. Disseminating press releases via e-mail is a method that has been adopted by many PR departments in higher education. However, many small rural newspapers lack the technology to receive the press releases electronically and still prefer the paper format (personal communication, D. Hamby, July 16, 2003). In addition, a fairly recent national survey administered to newspaper writers indicated that mail and fax are the preferred method of delivery over e-mail when receiving press releases (Cantelmo, 2001).

Another technical advancement that has changed the way journalists and PR practitioners deliver press releases is the Internet; universities have established PR Web sites. A recent study by a PR and advertising agency and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism found that almost 75% of journalists use the Internet every day to gather data (Kelley, 2000). Most universities have links to their PR Web sites, which allow the reporter to search a database of press releases to find information currently of interest to them rather than be bombarded with non-relevant stories on a daily basis. According to Bowden (1999), PR Web sites on the Internet "have created powerful research tools for busy reporters and, in the process, have enhanced the relationship between publicists and the press" (p. 26). However, not all university PR practitioners are sold on the Internet. In Zoulas' 2001 article, "College PR is About People, Not Technology," Peter Chisholm, assistant to the president at Framingham State

College and coordinator of the college's PR, stated that personal contact is the key to successful PR. In the same article, *Providence Journal* education reporter Gina Macris said that although e-mail and a cell phone give her the flexibility to work anywhere, it is more rewarding to have personal contact with a source or newsmaker.

Nevertheless, the newspaper depends on PR to help fill news holes created by cut-backs of newsroom personnel conversly the PR practitioner depends on the newspaper to communicate to their audiences to ensure the communicate its image and ultimately ensure the survival of the institution and its image (Kazoleas et al., 2001; Stegall, 1985; Theus, 1993; Yavas & Shemwell, 1996).

The Relationship Between the Public Relations Practitioner and Newspaper Writer

Perhaps one of the most important relationships a university PR practitioner will have is with the local newspapers' higher education writers. The relationship between the university and the newspaper started during the colonial period. Warner (1996) found that as more newspapers populated the colonies, the newly founded American universities had more opportunity to utilize the newspaper for the placement of advertisements and articles.

Very few studies have examined the relationship between the university PR practitioner and newspaper writer specifically. Most studies have investigated the relationship between PR and the newspaper in general. The earliest study of the relationship between journalists and PR was conducted by Aronoff (1975). His study of Texas reporters and PR practitioners suggested a shaky relationship. He reported that the newspaper writer perceived the PR practitioner as having low credibility. In another study related to the relationship between the newspaper and PR practitioners, Murray (1991) suggested the adversarial feelings arise from what the newspaper writer calls "unacceptable practices" performed by PR writers. The shady methods used by private and public PR firms to influence the public always have been distinguishable characteristics in differentiating between the newspaper writer and the PR practitioner. Biggar (1995) found a preponderance of negative feelings towards people in PR by news personnel. He added that news personnel disagree with the notion that a relationship ever has existed between reporters and PR practitioners. Aronoff suggested journalists have negative feelings toward different news values from PR practitioners. A few years later he commented that journalists have mixed feelings toward the PR practitioners, suspecting them of manipulation, while depending on them for information (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983).

Other studies have indicated that the relationship has become more cooperative and reciprocal. As two branches of communication, the PR practitioner and the newspaper writer experience similar training and education and share similar values and goals. Turk (1986) once described the PR practitioner as a journalist who is an advocate for the public. Gueder (1995) suggested that the PR practitioner think and write like the newspaper writers to get their attention.

Most journalists view themselves as investigators and are more interested in covering stories related to conflict (Ratcliff, 1995). Therefore, the attention of the media appears to be easier to get when the news is negative (Gueder, 1995). Many PR practitioners fail to understand the criteria the newspaper writers use when receiving press information. Thus, PR practitioners need to understand the perspective of the newspaper writers. Additionally, because the relationship between university PR practitioners and journalists is often strained (Burness, 1993), most press releases end up in the trash (Kelley, 2000). Though studies are mixed, some have indicated that from 55% to 97% of press releases are discarded by the media (Morton, 1995).

To establish a positive relationship, PR practitioners in higher education have to become more understanding and responsive to the news media and more open in regards to the information they provide to the media, especially during critical times (Kelley, 2000). Because of the emphasis on media relations and crisis communication specifically, many universities prefer to hire PR professionals who have written for the media or have experience working with the press. As a result, most universities prefer that PR applicants have a journalism backgrounds (Bobbitt, 1996).

Another step in developing better communication with the media is hiring outside PR firms to assist in the marketing function. Outside firms have more resources and staff to handle larger imaging campaigns than does the university, therefore having better communication and access to the media (Bobbitt, 1996). However, cost and skepticism regarding the effectiveness of hiring outside PR firms have hindered many institutions from using this method. In Tennessee, the State University and Community College System paid a Nashville-based PR agency $60,000 to devise ways to raise the system's image ("Ways and Means," 2001); but, many universities are skeptical about the benefits of hiring outside PR entities (Kelley, 2000). As a result, university PR practitioners prefer to use conventional methods to communicate with the media rather than utilize outside methods that may deplete an already limited budget (Bobbitt).

The Newspaper as a Gatekeeper

The theory of gatekeeping is one of the oldest in the field of mass communication research. Psychologist Kurt Lewin first proposed a gatekeeping process in his post-World War II research on social change (Shoemaker, Eicholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). His study dealt with the purchase of different foods to examine changing food habits of a population. Lewin noted that information had to pass through channels that had "gate areas" where decisions are made by impartial rules or personally by the "gatekeepers" (Mc Quail & Windahl, 1981, p. 100). He suggested that the gatekeepers who made the decisions in the purchase and ordering of food, such as the mother, could change the food habits of the entire family (Shoemaker, 1999).

For the last 50 years, most of the research studies using the gatekeeping model have closely examines those who have control over the news and the criteria used in selecting the news that ultimately reaches the outside audience. Building on Lewin's study, David Manning White (1950) applied the gatekeeping concept to the media. In a study of a telegraph wire editor of an American nonmetropolitan newspaper, whom he called "Mr. Gates," White found that each news story must pass through a series of gates before it is printed. The gates were multiple channels the message had to pass through prior to reaching the audience. These multiple gates were the newspaper editors, reporters, and writers in White's study. White reported that 90% of the news stories received on the wire service were rejected.

A few years later, in 1956, Gieber studied the gatekeeping process of 16 wire services and their selection of news copy for publication. He suggested that those in charge of selecting the news were complacent and separated from their audience, therefore becoming passive as a communicator. He added that the wire service is the real gatekeeper in the process. Gieber found that the newspapers based many of their decisions on space available and how the news impacted special interest groups. They then adjusted the length in the editing process.

Sandman, Rubin, and Sachsman (1972), in their studies of the gatekeeping process, suggested that the gatekeeper is anyone who gathers news and has the authority to decide on the flow of information to the public. In one of Shaw and McCombs' (1977) many studies, they found that writers played an important role as gatekeepers in "shaping our society's reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying stories" (p. 5).

Because the gatekeepers can shape the content of the news, they also have the ability to mold the public's opinion. In his study of how entertainment writers report pop culture, Scott (2001) noted that the media has the "effect of selecting the product from generality, highlighting it, and generally suggesting that you, the consumer, should take note of it" (p. 47). Kim (2002) suggested that gatekeeping in the media starts with news selection by a team of editors and writers and ends with a final selection, shaping and delivering the news to the consumer. In its simplest conceptualization, gatekeeping is the process by which the vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that actually are transmitted by the news media (Shoemaker et al., 2001).

Essentially, all information disseminated to the media must meet certain news criteria and pass through the "gates" to be delivered to the targeted audience. A substantial amount of gatekeeping literature has identified a framework of analysis consisting of various news factors (Kim, 2002). Typical definitions of news suggested by journalists include "news is the same thing happening to different people," or news is "what I am interested in" (Hausman, 1990, p. 9). Such comments illustrate that "the critical task of capturing news is entrusted to an indescribable skill whose workings are uncertain" (Rock, 1981, p. 66).

Often journalists use news criteria that are subjective. White (1950) suggested that the gatekeeper uses a set of news criteria with no set standard of rules. Other news criteria are more traditional in the journalism profession. Shoemaker (1991) concluded that gatekeeping news decisions are based on pre-established ideas and generalized established journalistic norms in judging newsworthiness, including novelty, human interest, conflict, and timeliness. Reisner (1989) studied the news selection process of 10 midwestern newspapers. She concluded, after recording 10 meetings in which decisions were being made on news content, that four major criteria are used in selecting stories: (a) proximity, (b) conflict, (c) impact, and (d) definiteness. In another study examining news criterion, Morton and Ramsey (1994) found content to be the major news criteria for news personnel when deciding whether a story is newsworthy. Stovall (2002) added two criteria to Reisner's findings: (a) prominence, or who is involved in the event; and (b) timeliness, or when did or will the event occur. Rapp (2001) suggested two criteria that newspaper writers look for in publishing a story: (a) brevity and (b) the classic five Ws and the one H—who, what, why, where, when, and how.

The organization's culture and ownership also has an influence on the set of criteria used in the news selection process. According to Donahue, Tichenor, and Olien (1972), the gatekeeping process and selection of news involve a complex set of rules and practices used within the organization. Hollifield (1999) suggested that ownership has an impact on the organizational culture and the way news stories are covered. Internal influences may impact news selection practices include how messages are shaped and timed for dissemination, the length and degree of editing required, placement of the story, and its length (Donahue, et al.)

A more useful approach is to focus on how journalists *learn* how to determine what is news (Dimmick, 1974; Shoemaker, 1991). The socialization process has an effect on one's values and beliefs when making decisions. As suggested by many studies, part of that process is one's education. Journalists learn what news is from the training they receive from their journalism professors who were once former professional journalists. Ubinas (1999) suggested that the best method in training future journalists is the professor's ability to share with the students the realities of the newsroom. In an earlier sociological media study, Breed (1955) described how journalists are socialized into their profession. Breed's article pointed to company policies and esteem of supervisors as important influences on the news selection process. In White's (1950) classic study, he found that Mr. Gates' criterion for rejecting a news story were very subjective in nature. White added that the criterion was a creation of the gatekeeper's experiences, attitudes, and expectations. Cartmell (2001), in his doctoral dissertation, found that the gatekeeper's feelings and perception of the standards of the community as well as the gatekeeper's opinions, beliefs, and attitudes play a significant role in the selection of news. Therefore, the gatekeeper brings in his or her own biases when selecting stories. However, Cartmell warned that the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions would vary over the entire country. What may be selected as news on the east coast newspaper may not be selected as news by a midwestern newspaper, making it difficult to generalize the news criteria used by journalists.

Newspaper Coverage of Higher Education

The newspaper plays an important role as gatekeeper in the shaping of the public's understanding of issues in higher education. In the past, the attitudes of reporters toward covering education were dismal; reporters considered the education beat a step below the police beat and a step above obituary writing (Bernstein, 1982). The lack of respect for the position of education reporter continued during and after World War II. Education writers were the least experienced reporters and were assigned the unwelcome task of getting a few paragraphs about education in the papers (Hurley, 1997). Education writers, generally women during this period, became professionalized in the 1940s and 1950s. War protests on university campuses and the chaos that followed made the position a more attractive beat. In the 1970s education was less desirable as a beat and less interesting to cover than it had been in the 1960s (Bernstein, 1982). Ross (1983) studied education reporting in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1960 to 1975 and found an increase, although comparatively small, in emphasis on the "education reporter." According to Ross, "Things haven't changed much" (p. 352). In a 40-year study of education reporting in the *Los Angeles Times, New York Times,* and *Chicago Tribune,* Wells (1986) suggested that coverage fluctuates from decade to decade. It depends on the mood of the country, the current administration's focus, and the current social crisis. Although the number of stories declined decade after decade, the quality of reporting had increased. Wells suggested that newspapers were doing a better job of covering education by providing longer stories, better placement, and a better type of coverage.

The outcomes have been encouraging for university PR practitioners. However, the reason for the increased coverage of higher education was not the increased interest by the writer, but the result of the newspaper's inability to fill news holes. Murray (1991) suggested that journalists need PR staff to provide them with news stories and sources. In addition, Baskin and Aronoff (1992) found that newsrooms depend on press releases because, due to shrinking budgets, they lack the resources to cover all the stories.

When reporters do cover higher education stories, many in academe believe that the reporters fail to have a strong knowledge of the topic, therefore giving no substance to the story. Burness (1993) and Carey (1993) argued that the media's ability to adequately cover higher education issues is extremely questionable due to the lack of investigative skills. Ratcliff (1994) added that newspapers do not address the complexity of the issues and how they affect higher education policy.

In a study of the California higher education system, Chance (1993) suggested that the newspaper reporters did a good job of covering what he called "first kind" issues that are typical and obvious, such as budget cuts, tuition hikes, and mismanagement. However, he suggested that the newspaper did a poor job with stories described as "second kind" that were complex in nature and required more depth and thought. These stories would include subjects such as the effectiveness of a college degree and the state of higher education in the 21st century (Chance).

Many in academe are finding that reporters are being more aggressive in covering higher education. Kelley (2000) suggested that journalists are publishing more controversial issues and policy-type stories. Ratcliff (1995) found that most journalists view themselves as "watchdogs" and are more apt to cover stories that are related to conflict, such as mismanagement or misuse of funds. Because the watchdog attitude is prevalent in the journalism culture, many reporters are pulled away from stories relating to policy in higher education. Ratcliff (1995) found that if the policy did not involve conflict, the reporters were not interested.

R. A. Carroll (1992) encouraged reporters to be more critical when covering higher education. Ratcliff (1996) stated that articles in the *Columbia Journalism Review* and newsletters for education writers and investigative reporters "advocate a get-tough stance on higher education" (p. 3). "Universities have failed to air their dirty laundry," one reporter stated, "and accountability will not occur until the press starts enforcing it" (D. Carroll, 1994, p. 6). Also, social changes have forced the press to look more closely at higher education. Trachtenberg (2001) added that, as more people become college educated, society "demands more reporting, and smarter reporting, about academic matters" (p. 30).

In a content analysis conducted by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University, newspaper coverage of higher education increased during the period from 1987 to 1992 (Ratcliff, 1994). However, the researchers cautioned that most of the stories were related to public concerns with rising cost of tuition and accessibility in the editorials and op-ed pieces analyzed.

Not all coverage is negative. A study that examined how newspapers covered public research universities found that the university was covered well when it was in close proximity to the newspaper. The study looked at seven newspapers around the country with a circulation of over 250,000 and found that the newspapers devoted more coverage to research institutions than to the smaller universities and 2-year colleges (Ratcliff, 1995).

Clearly, media coverage has not always been kind to higher education, with most of the attention on costs, accessibility, and quality. Unfortunately, many universities have not behaved well, which has generated unfavorable coverage in the past and placed a strain on the relationship between the newspaper and the university. As a result, the institution's ability to shape the public's image through the use of the newspaper affects fundraising efforts, enrollment, and public and private support.

Summary

Image was not a factor for universities in the early periods of higher education. University administrators did not emphasize PR and marketing until the 1970s (Gaither, 1979). However, today, image plays a critical role in the attitudes associated with the institutional image. Image is the main reason students choose an institution (Armstrong, 1997; Sevier, 1994). To be successful at creating a positive image, the university PR department must set the agenda in the media (McQuail, 1994).

In higher education PR has grown tremendously since the first press release was printed and distributed in 1758 by King's College, now Columbia University (Woodress, 1976). However, from 1950 through the 1970s university administrators only saw PR as a damage control mechanism, and consequently did not see a need for a full-time PR department (Mulnix, 1996). By the 1980s, shrinking enrollments and public disenchantment made PR a necessary component to higher education and its survival (Jonsen, 1984).

The main method of communication the PR practitioner uses to set the public's agenda in the media is the press release. Despite some concern as to the effectiveness of the press release, it is still the most effective and widely used method by PR practitioners in gaining access to the media. However, all press information must pass through a series of gates, therefore suggesting the criteria used by media writers in selecting the news as an important variable. The factors affecting news writers' criteria when selecting stories can vary from the socialization of the individual to embedded industry news values (Cartmell, 2001; Shoemaker, 1991). Therefore, it is vital that the PR practitioner understand the intrinsic values and beliefs the newspaper higher education writers apply to their news selection process.

The relationship between higher education and the newspaper has been shaky at best. By the 19th century, universities warmed up to the newspapers after realizing the print media was a great tool to reach the masses with their message. However, not until the last decade or so has the newspaper shown a strong interest in covering the university (Ratcliff, 1994). Though academics warn that existing coverage is nearsighted, lacks depth, and is typically negative (Burness, 1993; Carey, 1993), the need for media coverage is vital to the institution. University PR practitioners and newspaper higher education writers need one another to fulfill their respective responsibilities; newspapers rely on PR department press releases to fill news holes, and the PR firms depend on the media to deliver their message to enhance their image with the public (Aronoff, 1975).

This study examined the specific delivery methods used by the university PR practitioners in communicating to the newspapers. In addition, the study investigated how higher education writers select stories to be published in the newspaper. In the quantitative section of this study, a content analysis was used to look back at the coverage of the two state institutions by the two state metropolitan newspapers over the past 5 years and examine the tone, type of the stories and the amount of coverage the universities receive from the newspapers. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Overview

The main objectives of this study were (a) to better understand what PR delivery methods are used to gain coverage from the two metropolitan newspapers (b) to identify the criteria used by the newspapers' higher education reporters in the news selection process, and (c) to analyze the actual coverage received by the two state universities in the past 5 years in the two state newspapers,

A mixed methodology was used to address the objectives in this study. Denzin (1989) defined a mixed method as a "combination of methodologies in the study of a phenomenon" (p.234). According to Caswell (1994), using two methods adds scope and breadth to the study and assists in reducing the possible "bias and improves the validity of the data collected" (Gay & Airasian, 1992, p. 215). Though there is no "magic" in using a mixed methodology (Patton, 1990, p. 330), the use of two methodologies "overcome[s] the inherent weaknesses of single measurement instruments" (Denzin, p. 234). The qualitative method used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire administered to the higher education writers of the newspapers and the PR practitioners at the universities, and the quantitative method was a content analysis of 5 years of newspaper coverage.

The open-ended questionnaire was used to investigate the criteria for making news selections used by two state metropolitan newspapers, identified as Newspaper A and Newspaper B. This approach also examined the PR methods used by the two state universities, identified as Institution A and Institution B, to garner press coverage by the two newspapers. The content analysis was used to investigate the coverage that the two institutions received by two state metropolitan newspapers.

The first half of this chapter explains the qualitative approach: an open-ended questionnaire. This section of the chapter discusses the question design, advantages and disadvantages of using an open-ended questionnaire, research questions investigated by the open-ended questionnaire, and the steps in completing this phase of the study. The remaining balance of this chapter explains the quantitative approach to the study: a content analysis. Included in this section are the operational definitions, time frame, coding, data analysis, and the unit of analysis. The research questions addressed by the content analysis also are included in this section. This chapter concludes with a description of the data collection procedures used in this study and a brief summary.

The Qualitative Method: An Open-ended Questionnaire

This method allows the researcher to "investigate the current situation in a given area" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, p.61). It also allowed the respondents to elaborate in great detail, to take whatever direction they wanted, and to use whatever words they wanted to represent what they had to say (Patton, 1990).

The questionnaire was administered to two primary university PR practitioners and two newspaper higher education writers. This method assisted in determining the PR delivery methods used by the universities to garner coverage by the newspapers and the news criteria used by the higher education writers in selecting stories for print. The open-ended questionnaire allowed the researcher to better understand the attitudes, beliefs, and motivation of the PR practitioners and newspaper higher education reporters.

Question Design

Survey researchers have long debated the value of open- versus closed-ended questions, and there is little definitive research to back up preferences for one approach over the other (Converse, 1984). Many researchers have argued that, when examining new or complex issues, open-ended questions are superior to closed-ended questions (Tickamyer & Wood, 1998). This study incorporated the open-ended method.

Advantages amd Disadvantages of the Open-Ended Questionnaire

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) have defined three advantages to the use of an open-ended questionnaire. First, the problem can be investigated in a realistic setting. Second, the cost is inexpensive considering the amount of information gathered. Third, a large amount of information can be collected with relative ease from a variety of people.

The open-ended questionnaire method is not perfect. The method is of disadvantage when the researcher wants to manipulate the variables involved in the study. Causality is difficult to "establish because many intervening and extraneous variables are involved" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, p. 162). Another disadvantage is the wording of the questions can be misleading or confusing to the respondent. According to Wimmer and Dominick, the use of inappropriate wording or placement of questions within a questionnaire can bias results. Finally, organizing and constructing the themes from the questionnaire is a large task. According to Gay and Airasian (1992, p. 284), the open-ended questionnaire is more difficult and time consuming than coding close-ended questionnaires.

Research Questions

The open-ended questionnaire addressed the first four research questions posed in chapter 1. The questionnaire included a set of questions specifically designed for the higher education writers and the university PR practitioners. This approach allowed each group to give a unique perspective to each research question.

Research Question 1. What are the PR delivery method(s) the two state universities use to communicate with the two state metropolitan newspapers?

Studies have indicated that e-mail, fax, and traditional mail are normally the most popular formats when delivering press releases (Cantelmo, 2001; Zoulas, 2001). However, the use of other technology, such as Web sites and cell phones, has been making an impact on the delivery methods used by PR staff (Bowden, 1999). This research question addressed the use of technology in communicating stories to the newspaper as well as investigated communication styles and preferences. The following set of questionnaire items was specifically designed for the university PR practitioners to answer Research Question 1 (see Appendix A):

1. What PR delivery methods do you use to communicate to the newspapers (for example, tip sheets, telephone calls, personal visits, fax, or e-mail)?

2. Which of these PR delivery methods is used the most to communicate with Newspaper A and Newspaper B? Why?

3. How often do you pitch a story to Newspaper A and Newspaper B?

4. How many visits a month do you make to Newspaper A and Newspaper B?

5. Approximately, how many press releases do you send to Newspaper A and Newspaper B?

6. Of the PR delivery methods used to communicate to Newspaper A and Newspaper B, what percentage do you think are press releases?

The following questionnaire items addressed Research Question 1 from the higher education writer's perspective (see Appendix B):

7. What PR delivery methods do you prefer when receiving information from the university PR departments (for example, tip sheets, telephone calls, personal visits, fax or e-mail)?

8. Which of these PR delivery methods is used the most by Institution A and Institution B?

9. How many visits a month do Institution A and Institution B make to the newspaper?

10. Approximately, how many press releases do you receive from Institution A and Institution B?

11. Of the PR delivery methods received from the universities, what percentage do you think are press releases?

Research Question 2. What are the university's most effective PR delivery method(s) in gaining access to the newspaper?

Studies have indicated that certain methods are more useful than others during special circumstances (Zoulas, 2001). However, studies have suggested that newspaper writers prefer more conventional methods such as the fax machine and the paper news release as do PR practitioners when communicating and receiving story ideas (Bobbitt, 1996). This research question intended to investigate which delivery methods were preferred and most effective in obtaining newspaper coverage for the university. The following questionnaire items were designed to answer Research Question 2 from the PR practitioner's perspective (see Appendix A):

1. What PR method appears to be the most effective in gaining the attention of the newspaper writer or editor? Why?

2. What PR method appears to increase the chance of the story getting printed? Why?

3. What PR method do you think the newspaper writer and editor prefer to receive from your office? Why?

The following questionnaire items were used to address Research Question 2 from the higher education writer's perspective (see Appendix B):

4. What PR delivery method appears to be the most effective in gaining your attention? Why?

5. What PR delivery method appears to increase the chance of the story getting printed in your paper? Why?

Research Question 3. What criteria did the newspaper higher education writers use when determining whether a story gets printed?

Studies have suggested that news selection is a process in which the writers, editors, and others use their unique perspectives to shape and deliver the news to the consumer (Kim, 2000). Specifically, in this study, the research question investigated the newspaper higher education writer's criteria in selecting stories for print and the PR practitioner's perception of news criteria. It is important that the university PR department have an understanding of what criteria are more prevalent, and how circumstances can affect the criteria when communicating to the newspaper higher education writers.

The following questions were specifically designed to answer Research Question 3 from the PR practitioner's perceptive (see Appendix A):

1. What criteria do you think the newspaper writers and editors look for when making news selections?

2. Which of the factors in news selection do you think is the most important in choosing a story for print?

3. Do you think you have a good understanding of the elements the reporter or editor you work with want in a story?

The following questionnaire items were specifically designed to answer Research Question 3 from the higher education writer's perspective (see Appendix B):

4. What criteria do you use when making news selections?

5. Which of the factors in news selection do you think is the most important in choosing a story for print?

6. Does Institution A have a good understanding of the criteria needed in a story?

7. Does Institution B have a good understanding of the criteria needed in a story?

Research Question 4. How did the relationship between the higher education writers and the university PR departments affect news coverage?

Very few studies have investigated the relationship between PR practitioners and newspaper writers; however, studies have suggested that the relationship between PR practitioners and newspaper writers has been tumultuous (Biggar, 1995; Murray, 1991). History has also suggested that the press has not always covered higher education positively (Ratcliff, 1995). Because of this, it is important that the university PR practitioner understand that the relationship with the newspaper higher education writer plays an important role in getting positive press coverage. This research question addresses the relationship between PR practitioner and higher education writer and how it may affect news coverage of the institutions.

The following questionnaire items were specifically designed to answer Research Question 4 from the PR practitioner's perceptive (see Appendix A):

1. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Newspaper A?

2. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Newspaper B?

3. How important is it to maintain a healthy relationship with the newspapers?

4. How does the relationship affect the PR functions of your office?

5. Do you find most of the press coverage by Newspaper A is favorable to the university?

6. Do you find most of the press coverage by Newspaper B is favorable to the university?

The following questionnaire items were specifically designed to answer Research Question 4 from the higher education writer's perspective (see Appendix B):

7. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Institution A?

8. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Institution B?

9. How important is it to maintain a healthy relationship with the institution's PR departments?

10. How does the relationship affect your daily writing functions?

11. Do you find most of the press coverage by your paper is favorable to the Institution A?

12. Do you find most of the press coverage by your newspaper is favorable to the Institution B?

Further questions and follow-ups to the responses were requested if needed. This prevented any misunderstandings or contextual errors. The open-ended questionnaire for the PR practitioners can be found in Appendix A and the questionnaire for the newspaper higher education writers can be found in Appendix B.

Key Informants

A few key informants can provide valuable information about an issue if two things are present: "choosing good informants and asking them things they know about" (Bernard, 1994, p.165). Participants in this study have several years of experience in their profession and are well respected in their area of expertise. The subjects of this study were the two newspaper's higher education writers and the universities' news bureau director at Institution A and vice-president of public affairs at Institution B.

Sample

"Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($n = 1$), selected purposefully" (Patton, 1990, p. 169), reducing the importance of how many people are interviewed or polled (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Because of the unique relationship between the higher education writer and university PR practitioner, the sample consisted of the two higher education writers of the two newspapers and the two primary university PR practitioners. The total number of participants was 4.

The Cover Letter

Each participant was contacted by e-mail and phone call prior to delivering the cover letter indicating that they would be receiving a request for participation in a study. Once contacted, each subject was assured confidentiality. Once approval was established, each participant received an e-mail cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, emphasizing the importance and significance, and reminding the participant that the results would be confidential and would not be traceable to a university, organization, or personal name.

Pretesting Questionnaire

To test the content validity, the questionnaire was distributed to thoughtful and critical subjects that were similar to the research participants. This method would provide information about deficiencies and suggestions in improving the questionnaire. According to Gay and Airasian (1992), this step assists the investigator in "examining the completeness of the questionnaire" (p. 288). Once feedback was received, suggestions were evaluated and adjustments were made to the questionnaire. It was suggested that the type of method was ambiguous when discussing how the press release is delivered to the media. Therefore, the phrase "the method used to communicate" to the media was changed to read, "The delivery method used to communicate" to the media. The change was judged on the relevancy to the purpose of the study.

Delivery Method

In this study, a questionnaire was administered to the subjects via e-mail. As the Internet grows, more and more people use e-mail to communicate; as a result, researchers have found the Internet to be an effective medium for building and deploying new techniques and applications in research (Tanner, 2002). The Council of American Survey Research Organizations concluded that online data are reliable and generally comparable to more traditional methods.

Using e-mail questionnaires has numerous advantages. A researcher can reach many people at one time, and data collection is instantaneous. In this study, the respondents were more open to receiving the questionnaire via e-mail and more apt to respond to an electronic questionnaire because of the convenience the delivery method offers in receiving and sending the data. The subjects all had access to or owned a computer and the basic software needed to respond to the questionnaire.

Follow-Up Activities

The participants were advised to return the questionnaire in a 2-week period, however not all questionnaires were returned by the deadline. A second set of questionnaires was sent to the participants with a short cover letter reemphasizing the importance of their data to the study's validity. The second response resulted in all subjects returning the questionnaire. If a participant's response was confusing or unclear, an e-mail or phone call clarified the answer.

Data Analysis

Every qualitative study is unique, so the approach to analyzing the data is unique (Patton, 1990). A characteristic of qualitative research is its ongoing analyses of data (Janesick, 1998). The challenge faced by qualitative researchers, according to Patton (1990), is the fact there is no way to replicate the researcher's analytical thought pattern, therefore there is no straightforward test for reliability and validity. In short, researchers have no absolute rule but to use the best of their intellectual ability to fairly represent the data and to communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the topic (Patton, 1990, p. 372).

In this study, the results of the interview were coded by themes, categories, and patterns that developed; then generalized conclusions were drawn to answer the original research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1985).

The Quantitative Method: Content Analysis

The second part of this two-phased study incorporated a quantitative approach. A content analysis was conducted to investigate the coverage that two state universities received from two state metropolitan newspapers. Content analysis is a method popular with mass media researchers because it is an efficient way to investigate the content of the media, such as the numbers, types, and frequencies of occurrences (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). As for weaknesses, the content analysis cannot be used as an instrument to suggest media effects or the intent of those who produce the message (Kelley, 2000). That is why it is important to include qualitative methods along with quantitative methods, as in this study (Patton, 1990).

Research Questions

This study examined the following variables: tone of stories, type of stories, and the amount of coverage. The content analysis addressed the last three research questions of the study.

Research Question 5. Is the news coverage of the two institutions favorable, unfavorable, or neutral in nature?

Studies have suggested that the content the media delivers to the consumer—specifically in this study, the newspaper—can mold the public image of an institution negatively or positively (Scott, 1999). This research question investigated the tone of stories the two metropolitan newspapers printed in regards to the two institutions. This study followed Steger's (1996) content analysis of press coverage in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* of candidates in the 1996 Republican Presidential Primaries as a model.

To better operationalize the three variables, Steger (1996) analyzed stories for adjectives; like *energetic*, *upbeat*, or *improving* indicated positive tone, whereas words like *lethargic*, *somber*, or *struggling* indicated negative tone. In addition, he included events, quotes, or poll information that might harm a candidate as unfavorable coverage. These included attacks on or criticisms of a candidate, a focus on the charges or accusations in a scandal, gaffes, organizational problems, financial problems, or declining candidate position in or at the polls. Positive or favorable coverage included events, quotes, or poll information that might be of an advantage to the candidate. These included references to "successful" strategies or tactics, improved financial status, or improving candidate position in or at the polls.

Research Question 6. What type of stories did the newspapers cover more frequently in regards to the two institutions?

The type of stories the newspaper reports to the public plays an important role in developing the public's image of the accomplishments, achievements, and failures of the university; therefore, the types of stories were investigated by using content analysis. In maintaining reliability in coding the types of stories, if the article appeared to cover more than one area in a story, the coders attributed the story to the category that received the most words in the story. In cases where multiple small stories appeared, the stories addressing the universities were coded only.

Research Question 7. Is there a difference in the amount of coverage the two newspapers devoted to the two state institutions?

This question addressed the amount of space the two newspapers devoted to higher education issues relating to the two institutions. The amount of space devoted to the institutions may have an affect on the public image by providing the public perception that one university is more important than the other university. Therefore, it was appropriate to study the amount of coverage. This was measured by counting the number of words devoted to each story. This provided an average word count per story as well as the total amount of coverage. The coders analyzed each story that mentioned the two universities.

Newspapers Sampled

The state's two largest newspapers were chosen for this study mainly because of their large circulation, which gives them more opportunity to impact image. Furthermore, print media research has indicated that larger papers influence the content of smaller papers (Readership Institute Media Management Center, 2001). According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, Newspaper A has a circulation of 152,323 daily and 213,195 Sunday, and Newspaper B has a circulation of nearly 199,581 daily and 299,724 Sunday.

Time Frame Sampled

The time frame for the study was the most recent 5-year period, starting January 1, 1998, and ending December 31, 2002. Lacy, Riffe, Stoddard, Martin, and Kuo-Chang (2001) suggested constructing 9 weeks from a 5-year sample as the minimum number of randomly constructed weeks needed for an accurate inference to a population of 5 years of a daily newspaper's editions. Following Lacy, et. al., the 9 weeks were divided as follows: 2 weeks from 1998, 2 weeks from 1999, 2 weeks from 2000, 2 weeks from 2001, and 1 week from 2002. The weeks were chosen randomly from a list of 52 calendar weeks. For example, if Week 1 were chosen, then the week of January 1–6 of the respective year would be analyzed. Each random week chosen was used to analyze both newspapers' coverage. The total number of newspaper editions examined was 126, or 63 editions of each paper.

The sampled weeks were accessed through each newspaper's online version of its publication. The university acronyms were used to access the stories contributed by the two newspapers using their respective Web site search engines. Using the acronyms of the universities was an accurate search method because (a) the writers in the particular state have a tendency to use the acronyms in their headlines and throughout the entire story, (b) the writers' practice is to use the acronym in the second mention of the university in the story, and (c) the universities are more commonly addressed in the media and understood by the readers in this southwestern state by the use of their acronyms.

Intercoder Reliability

Two individuals conducted all coding. The primary researcher was the first coder. The second coder, a female mass communications student, was trained prior to conducting the content analysis to familiarize her with the definition of the variables and the coding procedure. During the coding process, the main investigator consulted with the dissertation advisor, who is well qualified in the area of media content analysis. Intercoder reliability (Holsti, 1969) checks were made upon a sample of the two newspapers by the two coders. The second coder was trained until there was a 80 percent agreement with the primary coder, which is usually the acceptable standard for intercoder agreement (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

Operational Definitions and Categories

The coders analyzed each story for the following elements: (a) the newspaper (Newspaper A or Newspaper B), (b) the school, (Institution A or Institution B), (c) the tone of the stories (favorable, unfavorable, or neutral), (d) the type of stories, and (e) the length of the stories. See Appendix C for the content analysis coding schema.

Coding schema for the tone of the story. Using Steger's (1996) content analysis of news coverage in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* as a model, favorable content implies that the person(s), place (s), or thing(s) covered in the story are advantageous to the institutional image. An example would be the awarding of a significant research grant to a professor or an increase in student enrollment.

Neutral content implies that the primary person(s), place(s), or thing(s) involved in the story are neither necessarily favorable nor unfavorable to the image of the university. An example would be a story focused on the Board of Regents deciding whether to offer a one-year contract to a new administrative hire.

Unfavorable content implies that the person(s), place(s), or thing(s) involved in the story are disadvantageous to the institution's image. An example would be a university fraternity displaying insensitive behavior relating to a specific race, or accusations or charges of a university scandal.

Coding schema for the type of story. The coding for the type of story was based on the following codes and descriptions (see Appendix C):

1. Crime: An institutional entity that participated or is a victim of a past or current criminal investigation.

2. Faculty/Administration: Adjunct and full-time faculty/staff and/or institutional administrators who are tied directly to the institution, past and present.

3. Facilities: The moving, destruction, or building of facilities by professional contractors and other circumstances that directly impact the use of facilities.

4. Research/Academics: Research grants, medical research, curriculum, school research polls, and other related areas.

5. Legal: Litigation pending or filed against institutional entities.

6. Students: Former or present students of the university.

7. Policy: Stories emphasizing traditional institutional practices and processes. Examples include changes in enrollment, changes in traditional graduation requirements, student grievance process, and tenure.

8. Factual: Quantified documented data. Examples include semester enrollment numbers, history of the institution, location, address, and degrees granted.

9. Alumni/Donors: Stories relating to personal contributions, monetarily or personally. Examples include recognition of alumni at an award banquet, and personal and company donations.

10. Finances/Budget: State appropriations, fundraising, tuition hikes, salaries, and contracts.

11. Security: Measures taken for institutional and public safety.

12. Clubs/Organizations: Fraternities, sororities, and other institutional organizational activities.

13. Community events: Institutional programs and events open to the public as well as to university students, faculty, or staff. Examples include theatre and arts performances, seminars, guest speakers, panels, and field trips.

14. Other: Areas that have not been identified by the other categories.

Coding schema for length of story. The actual length of the story was measured by the word count associated to each story. If both universities were mentioned in a single story, the story was coded and credited as one story for both institutions. The number of words in the story was attributed equally to both institutions. However, if one university established a significant majority of the coverage (.75) in the story, that university would get credit for the story, and receive the exact number of words attributed to its coverage, and the other institution received the exact number of words devoted to its institution, but not credit for the story. Significant coverage was factored by dividing the total number of words in the story by the total number of words attributed to the university. In stories that included other universities as well as Institution A and

Institution B, each school would receive the exact number of words attributed to their respective institutions and credit for the story.

Length was determined by selecting the paragraphs, sentences, or entire story that were attributed to the university. This was quantified by using Microsoft's word count program.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was entire stories appearing in the studied editions, excluding obituaries, sports, letters to the editor, editorials, corrections, advertisements, reviews, photographs, and cartoons. The news story was an appropriate unit of analysis when referring to identifying the quantity of space devoted to the school and in coding the tone of the content and type of story. The news stories chosen were those that related to the two universities in this study. The content had to be primarily focused on persons, places, or things related directly to the university (e.g., student, faculty, administrator, research, department, alumni, policy, and other institutional areas). The content relating to the university could not be of a secondary nature. For example, a quote from a professor employed by Institution B in relation to a story primarily focused on mad cow disease would have been excluded.

The study only examined stories related to the two 4-year universities, including their campus extensions as well as both institutional medical schools. The 2-year extension campuses were excluded from this study because they only offer associate degrees and are vocational in nature.

Counting the number of words used by the two newspapers in coverage of the two institutions allowed the researcher to analyze the amount of coverage and average length of story distributed by the newspapers to each school. This assisted in concluding whether or not there was a difference in the amount of coverage newspapers devoted to each university.

Data Analysis

T-tests and chi-square tests for significance indicated whether there was a significant difference between tone of stories, types of stories, and the amount of coverage given to the institutions by the two state newspapers.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research questions and detailed the qualitative and quantitative methodologies and procedure used in this study. The mixed methodology approach was deemed the most appropriate method to use in this study. The open-ended questionnaire was effective in understanding the communication process between the university PR practitioners and the newspaper higher education writers. The content analysis was effective in quantifying the tone, type, and amount of stories. Considering the complexity of the two issues, the mixed method of inquiry provided an effective avenue in investigating the two areas.

In chapter 4, results and discussion of the study are described. The final chapter summarizes the findings and conclusions of the study as well as suggests recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter is organized in terms of the seven research questions posed in chapter 1. The first half of the chapter reports the qualitative results of the open-ended questionnaire administered to the higher education writers of the newspapers and the university PR practitioners. The second half reports the quantitative findings of the newspaper coverage of the two universities based on a content analysis. The qualitative data were analyzed and developed into categories and patterns that emerged throughout the questionnaire. Once the categories and patterns were incorporated fully, they emerged into overall themes, which are representative of the total data analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed according to the following variables: tone of story, type of story, and length of story.

Qualitative Results

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to two newspaper higher education writers at two state metropolitan newspapers, identified as Newspaper A and Newspaper B and also to the two primary PR practitioners at two state universities—identified as Institution A and Institution B. The PR practitioners held the offices of news bureau director at Institution A and vice-president of public affairs at Institution B.

Participants in this study have had several years of experience in their profession and are well respected in their area of expertise. Institutions A and B are the two major state research universities in a small southwestern state; Institution A is a large land-grant university, and Institution B a nationally ranked research university. Newspapers A and B are the two largest papers from the two main metropolitan areas in the state. Newspaper A is in closest proximity to Institution A; Newspaper B, although situated between the two institutions, is geographically nearer Institution B.

Qualitative Analysis

The total number of participants was four. "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($n = 1$), selected purposefully" (Patton, 1990, p. 169), reducing the importance of how many people are interviewed or polled (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Because of the unique relationship between the higher education writer and university PR practitioner, the sample consisted of the two higher education writers at the two newspapers and the two universities' primary PR practitioners.

A questionnaire was administered via e-mail to the four participants. The participants were advised to return the questionnaire in a two-week period; however, not all questionnaires were returned by the deadline. A second, identical set of questionnaires was sent to the participants with a short cover letter emphasizing the importance of their data to the study's validity. The second response resulted in all subjects returning the questionnaire. If a participant's response was confusing or unclear, a follow-up e-mail or phone call clarified the answer. After collecting the data, an analysis was conducted to organize, categorize and interpret the patterns and themes that emerged.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked the following: What are the most widely used PR delivery methods in communicating to the two state metropolitan newspapers?

The themes generated from the open-ended questionnaire indicated that the most widely used PR delivery methods used at the two universities to communicate to the two newspapers are fax, e-mail, personal visits, media advisories, and the phone pitch.

Cantelmo (2001) found in a recent national survey administered to newspapers that mail and fax were used more widely than e-mail when receiving press releases. However, the PR practitioners in this study stated that fax and e-mail are the most popular PR delivery methods when communicating stories to the newspaper. The PR practitioners in this study used fax and e-mail an average of three to five times a day to distribute press releases to the higher education writers. This was consistent with the number of press releases the newspaper writers estimated were faxed and e-mailed to them. The higher education writer from Institution A estimated that a combined 100 press releases are either faxed or e-mailed to his office every month by both university PR departments.

In this study, the responses from the questionnaire indicated that personal visits are limited between the university and newspaper. The education writer from Newspaper A stated that the university president might visit “two to three times a year,” and PR practitioners might visit “once or twice a year.” The education writer from Newspaper B could not recall the last time a representative from Institution A had visited, but could recall a time when the press secretary of Institution B visited his office.

According to the PR practitioner from Institution A, too much contact with the newspaper can be perceived negatively, hence the small number of personal visits between the university and newspaper.

> The press should never be too cozy with PR people. If they are that way with you, you can bet they are that way with others....I do not take it personally. I represent an institution. Sometimes we do the right thing and sometimes not. My job is to present the good news. Their job is to report the facts as best they can.

Another delivery method used by the two institutions is the media advisory. The media advisory is very similar to the press release; the only difference is that the advisory is formatted in short phrases and bullets, whereas the press release is written completely and more formally. The PR practitioner from Institution A indicated that the newspapers "use the stories...sometimes." As for the newspapers, the higher education writer from Newspaper B found the media advisories from Institution A helpful.

The phone pitch is a delivery method that both institutions use on a routine basis. Institution A averaged one to two phone pitches per week for each newspaper, but had made phone pitches to the newspapers as much as four to five times a week. In general, the universities used the phone pitch three to five times a week. According to the PR practitioner from Institution B, this method allows for "more detail and attention" for hard-hitting stories. Although the higher education writers agreed that phone pitches are useful for hard news stories, they considered fax and e-mail to be just as effective in delivering the message.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked the following: What is the university's most effective PR delivery method(s) in gaining access in the newspapers?

The type of story dictated which delivery method was effective. If the situation required the university to get something out quickly to the newspapers, the PR practitioners favored the phone pitch. The PR practitioners from Institution A and Institution B use the phone pitch for "hard-hitting," stories (i.e., firings, new hires, and scandal) or when a subject is a "good idea." Many of the phone pitches were followed up with a press release or tip sheet to assist the writer in developing the story.

Of the stories delivered to the newspapers, most were press releases. According to the higher education writer from Newspaper A, 90% of the story ideas received at the newspaper are press releases. The respondent from Newspaper B estimated 75% of story ideas were press releases.

According to the participants, the press release is not useful in all situations. One PR practitioner in the study indicated that the press release is effective in explaining background material when the story includes a difficult issue. The other university PR practitioner stated that the press release is not functional for larger metropolitan newspapers, but is effective with smaller papers. The larger circulations have a tendency to rewrite the press release or not use it at all; in contrast, smaller papers usually print the release verbatim due to shrinking newsroom staffs (Kazoleas et al., 2001; Stegall, 1985; Theus, 1993; Yavas & Shemwell, 1996).

The PR practitioner from Institution A suggested that another factor in gaining access in the newspaper is an effective writing style: "Sometimes you can find that angle that will interest them and package it in an appealing way. Perhaps a big headline or photo that immediately tells them [the newspaper] the potential for the story."

Writing style is one of the most important communication skills of the PR practitioner (Ramsey, 1993). However, Arnoff (1975) found that a common criticism by newspaper reporters is that most press releases are not written correctly for print. In this study, both higher education writers described the press releases they have received from Institution A and Institution B as well written and stated that the press release authors had a solid grasp of the criteria required in a good press release. Both of the PR subjects in this study have bachelor degrees in journalism news; with one respondent having professional journalism experience, thus they have a strong understanding of the factors newspaper writers are looking for in press releases.

In summary, the newspaper higher education writers preferred different methods for different stories. Both Newspaper A and Newspaper B preferred e-mails for routine news stories and e-mails, fax, and the phone pitch for "harder hitting" stories. The newspaper writers suggested that both institutions fax, e-mail, and call at about the same frequency. The writer from Newspaper A estimated that the institutions provided 50 press releases a month via e-mail, fax, and phone.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked the following: What criteria do the newspaper higher education writers use when deciding whether a press release from the university PR department will get printed?

Both higher education newspaper writers suggested newsworthiness as a vital criterion in getting a story printed. According to the writer from Newspaper A,

> Newsworthiness is typically based on the impact of the topic on reader, i.e. health issues, monetary impact, educational and common good impact, accomplishments, hardship overcome or hardship in general, medical breakthroughs, homeland security, and political discussion. Press releases that tie their topics to these areas have better chances of catching the reporter's attention.

The writer from Newspaper B responded, "Newsworthiness, how newsy? How many it affects. Like, a pay bonus for all employees is more important than the naming of a vice president."

The responses from the higher education newspaper writers in this study are congruent with the literature: Minnis and Pratt (1995) and De Semir et al. (1998) found timeliness to be a major factor in getting a story printed in the media. In this study, the writers for Newspaper A and Newspaper B suggested timeliness had a significant impact on their news selection. The respondent from Newspaper A stated that informing the public in a timely manner is very important.

In addition to timeliness, content is a vital criterion. Morton and Ramsey (1994) found in their study of 129 press releases that content was the only factor that related to use. The higher education writers in this study described content as a significant element in getting a story printed, but not the only factor. According to the writer from Newspaper A, "Press releases mentioning higher education trends such as corrective measures for campus binge drinking or better study habits have a better chance than most stories."

How the story is written also has an impact on the news selection of the higher education reporters. Williams (1994) found that most press releases are not used because the PR practitioner does not write from a "newsman's point of view" (p. 5). The writer from Newspaper A suggested that press releases that "bury a story in the third paragraph" will likely be discarded. Both newspaper writers reported that the institutions' PR departments had a good understanding of what criteria needed to be in a story. However, the writer from Newspaper B suggested that "sometimes the obvious is left out."

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked the following: How does the relationship between the university PR departments and the newspapers affect the news coverage of the two schools?

Though the relationship between the PR department and the newspaper may not always be harmonious (Biggar, 1995), the PR practitioners in this study agreed that the relationship between their respective institutions and the higher education writers in this study was "good" and "friendly." The university PR practitioners in this study reported that the relationship with the newspapers had a positive impact on the PR functions of the university. The PR practitioner from Institution A described the relationship with Newspaper A as "adversarial," but also described the newspaper as being "fair" in their coverage of Institution A.

Respect was cited by the newspaper writers as important to the relationship between PR department and the newspaper. The higher education writer from Newspaper A suggested that for the university to maintain a strong presence in the newspaper, "a respectful relationship is imperative for the university to put forth the ideas that it believes have news value."

Another factor that has an effect on the relationship is the professional background of the PR practitioners. Gueder (1995) suggested that the PR practitioner must think like the newspaper writer to be effective. As a result, most universities prefer that PR applicants have a journalism background (Bobbitt, 1996). In this study, the PR practitioner from Institution A has a bachelor's degree in journalism and history, a master's degree in communications, and 25 years in public relations. The practitioner from Institution B has a bachelor's degree in journalism news, and 30 years of public relations experience.

Quantitative Results

A total of 119 stories from Newspaper A and Newspaper B between 1998-2002 were analyzed. Three variables were measured: tone of story, type of story, and length of story. Institution B ($n = 71$) received more stories overall than Institution A ($n = 48$). Newspaper B ($n = 80$) published more articles on higher education than Newspaper A ($n = 39$).

Additionally, the results suggested that Newspaper B was significantly more likely to cover Institution B (68.8%), and Newspaper A was more likely to cover Institution A (59 %), ($X^2 = 8.374$, $p = .004$), as indicated in Table 1. The data indicated that Newspaper A devoted 41% of its stories to Institution B; in contrast, Newspaper B devoted only 31.3% of its stories to Institution A. Newspaper A is associated geographically with Institution A, and Newspaper B is in closer proximity to Institution B. Research has suggested that geographical proximity has a large impact on the coverage (Ratcliff, 1995).

Table 1

Cross-Tabulation of the Two Newspaper's Coverage of the Two Institutions

Newspaper	Institution		Total
	Institution A	Institution B	
Newspaper A			
Count	23	16	39
% within paper	59.0	41.0	100.0
% within school	47.9	22.5	32.8
% of total	59.0	41.0	100.0
Newspaper B			
Count	25	55	80
% within paper	31.3	68.0	100.0
% within school	52.1	77.5	67.2
% of total	31.3	68.0	100.0
Total			
Count	48	71	119
% within paper	40.3	59.7	100.0
% within school	100.0	100.0	100.0
% of total	40.3	59.7	100.0

Intercoder Reliability

A total of 376 judgments were made. The two coders analyzed all 119 stories for the three variables. Of the 376 judgments, 28 disagreements occurred between the two researchers, of which 21 were related to type of story, 5 to tone of coverage, and 2 to length. To resolve the disagreements, the stories were reread, discussed, and resolved by reevaluating the tone of the story, redefining a category in relation to the type of story, or recounting the length. An intercoder reliability (Holsti, 1969) of .9256 was calculated.

Simple tests of mean differences (*t* tests) were performed when comparing the year-to-year coverage. Chi-square analysis and cross-tabulations were used to test the significance of categorical data in the study.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asked the following: Is the newspapers' coverage of the two institutions favorable, unfavorable, or neutral in nature?

In this analysis, the newspapers' overall coverage of the two institutions had more favorable content (66.4%) than unfavorable content (10.1%), with 23.5% of the tone being neutral, as noted in Table 2. A chi-square analysis indicated a significant difference in the tone of coverage between the two schools ($X^2 = 15.54, p = .001$) with more favorable coverage granted to Institution B (80.3%) than to Institution A (45.8%) (see Table 3).

Table 2

Overall Tone Coverage of Newspaper A and Newspaper B Combined

Tone	Frequency	Percent
Favorable	79	66.4
Neutral	28	23.5
Unfavorable	12	10.1
Total	119	100.0

Table 3

Overall Tone Coverage of Institution A and Institution B

Tone	Frequency	Percentage
Institution A		
Favorable	22	45.8
Neutral	19	39.6
Unfavorable	7	14.6
Total	48	100.0
Institution B		
Favorable	57	80.3
Neutral	9	12.7
Unfavorable	5	7.0
Total	71	100.0

Research Question 6

Research Question 6 asked the following: What type of story did the two newspapers mostly cover in regards to the two state institutions?

Using the chi-square analysis, results indicated no significant difference between the papers in terms of type of stories covered. Table 4 lists the types of stories covered by Newspaper A and the type of stories covered by Newspaper B. The category of community events appeared to be covered more frequently than any other type of story when combining the two newspapers (39.2%), with research and academics a close second (36.8%).

Table 4

Type of Stories Covered by Newspaper A and Newspaper B

Story type	Frequency		Percentage	
	Newspaper		Newspaper	
	A	B	A	B
Crime	3	4	7.7	5.0
Students	7	5	17.9	6.3
Faculty	3	6	7.7	7.5
Facilities	2	9	5.1	11.3
Research/Academics	8	13	20.5	16.3
Legal	2	4	5.1	5.0
Policy	1	6	2.6	7.5
Factual	0	3	0.0	3.8
Alumni	2	5	5.1	6.3
Finances	4	2	10.3	2.5
Security	0	3	0.0	3.8
Clubs/Organizations	0	2	0.0	2.5
Community events	7	17	17.9	21.3
Other	0	1	0.0	1.3
Total	39	80	100.0	100.0

Newspaper A covered stories more closely related to research and academics (20.5%), with students and community events (17.9%) not far behind.

Comparing the two newspapers, Newspaper B covered community events (21.3%) more frequently than did Newspaper A (17.9%). However, Newspaper A covered research and academic stories (20.5%) more frequently than did Newspaper B (16.3%). Individually, Newspaper A devoted most of its articles to research and academics, and Newspaper B devoted the majority to community events.

In terms of coverage by institution, Institution A received most of its coverage in community events (16.4%), whereas Institution B received the most stories in the categories of community events (22.4%) and research academics (22.4%).

Research Question 7

Research Question 7 asked the following: Was there a difference in the amount of coverage devoted to the two state institutions by the two state newspapers?

The content analysis revealed a rather large difference in total coverage of the two universities. Institution B received nearly twice the amount of coverage (30,273.69 total words) compared to Institution A (17,253.12 total words). A story- by- story analysis revealed that Institution A and Institution B received approximately the same number of words per story, with Institution A on average receiving 359 words per story and Institution B receiving 426 words per story (see Table 5). However, Institution B was mentioned in considerably more stories (71) than Institution A (48). Institution B received the largest story with 1,282 words and Institution A received the smallest story of 43 words, while the average higher education story contained 400 words.

Additionally, a t test revealed a significant difference in the amount of words per story ($t = .3.04$, $p = .003$) between the two newspapers. Newspaper A, although publishing fewer stories (39) than Newspaper B, devoted more words (498.26) per story overall. Newspaper B published more (80), yet shorter (351.19), stories.

Table 5

Average Length of Story for Institution A and Institution B

Story institution	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Institution A	48	359.44	224.66	32.43
Institution B	71	426.39	273.72	32.48

Summary

By using a mixed methodology, the results of this study were presented in this chapter. The qualitative results of the open-ended questionnaire administered to the two higher education writers of the two newspapers and the two primary university PR practitioners were presented first. The second half of the chapter presented the content analysis of the quantitative findings of the newspaper coverage of the two universities.

The qualitative results revealed that fax, phone calls, and e-mail were the most popular methods of delivering press releases to the newspapers. However, the PR delivery method used was dependent on the type of story. If the story included a firing of a university president, the newspaper writers preferred a phone call; if the press release included a simple story relating to a donor gift, the story only required an e-mail or fax.

The criteria used by the newspaper writers consist of standard methods most writers incorporate in making news selections. The newspaper writers in this study cited impact on the local audience (proximity) and timeliness as the most salient criteria in deciding what is news.

The relationship between the two institutions and the two state metropolitan newspapers was sound and respectful. One higher education writer made it clear that the respect must be reciprocated for the university to be successful in getting good news coverage.

The content analysis revealed some interesting data. The results suggested that Newspaper A was more likely to cover Institution A (59.0%) than Institution B (41.0%), and Newspaper B was more likely to cover Institution B (68.0%) than Institution A

(31.3%). This is not surprising, because the proximity of the two newspapers to the two schools has a large impact on the coverage, as suggested by Ratcliff (1995).

In terms of the tone, Institution B received more favorable coverage overall (80.3%) than Institution A (45.8%). In terms of type of story there was no difference between the two universities. Institution B received the most stories in the categories of community events (22.4%) and research and academics (22.4%). Likewise, Institution A received most of its coverage in community events (16.4%). As for the two newspapers, combined they devoted most of their stories to community events (20.2%). However, individually, Newspaper A devoted most of its articles to research and academics (20.5%), and Newspaper B devoted the majority to community events (21.3%).

In terms of the amount of coverage, Institution B received more overall coverage than Institution A. A *t* test revealed a significant difference in the amount of words per story ($t = .3.04$, $p = .003$) between the two newspapers. Of the two newspapers, Newspaper A, although publishing fewer stories than Newspaper B, devoted more words per story overall to the two universities. Newspaper B published more stories, but devoted fewer words per story overall to the two institutions.

In chapter 5, the findings that emerged from these data are discussed. A summary of the findings is presented as well as the implications for practice and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 5

Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter reviews the purpose of the study and the methodology. It then integrates the results of the open-ended questionnaire and the content analysis and discusses the findings. Implications for current practice and recommendations for further study conclude this chapter.

Purpose of This Study

The PR departments of higher education institutions have a responsibility to maintain a strong institutional public image. It is, after all, the image that will impact a student's willingness to apply to that institution for enrollment, or a donor's consideration of an endowment, or a company's selection of an institution to do contracted research and development (Bok, 1990; Ivy, 2001; Phair, 1992). Therefore, it is essential that the university leaders have a clear understanding of the role that the mass media play in creating the institutional image and the PR methods that are the most effective in achieving this outcome.

This study examined the PR processes used by the two state research universities in conjunction with the two state metropolitan newspapers in shaping the public's image. More specifically, the study investigated the amount and nature of news coverage about higher education and the criteria used by the newspapers' higher education writers in deciding what gets published about the universities.

This study provided a better understanding of what PR methods are used, preferred, and effective in setting the public's agenda in regards to the university. In addition, examining the selection criteria of the two metropolitan newspapers aids the PR practitioner in understanding the newspaper writers decision-making process. The analysis of the newspaper coverage quantified and described the trends and patterns in the tone, type, and amount of news coverage in the two metropolitan newspapers. The findings herein, allow the PR departments of the two universities to better evaluate coverage in the two newspapers. In addition, the outcome of the study can help university administrators and PR personnel to communicate more effectively with newspapers about higher education issues.

Research Questions

1. What PR delivery methods do the two state research universities use to communicate to the two state metropolitan newspapers?

2. What are the university's most effective PR delivery method(s) in gaining access to the newspaper?

3. What criteria do the newspaper higher education writers use when deciding whether a press release from the university PR department gets printed?

4. How does the relationship between the university PR departments and the newspapers affect the news coverage of the two schools?

5. Is the news coverage of the two institutions favorable, unfavorable or neutral in nature?

6. What type of story did the two newspapers cover more frequently in regards to the two state institutions?

7. Is there a difference in the amount of coverage devoted to the two state institutions by the two state newspapers?

Review of Methodology

A mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative methods was used in this study. Using a mixed methodology provided the study with more scope and depth and assisted in reducing possible biases. In addition, it improved the "validity of the data collected" (Gay & Airasian, 1992, p. 215), and assisted the investigator in "overcoming the inherent weaknesses of single measurement instruments (Patton, 1990, p.330)." The two methods used in this study complemented one another nicely in that each provided rich deep data strengthening the findings.

In this study, an open-ended questionnaire was used to gather data of the PR delivery methods used by the universities; the news criteria used by the higher education writers, and the relationship between the university PR practitioners and the higher education writers. In Fall 2003 the two leading higher education news writers from the two state metropolitan newspapers and the two head PR practitioners of the universities completed an open-ended questionnaire via e-mail. The results were transcribed and analyzed by the primary investigator.

A quantitative content analysis was conducted to investigate the coverage of the universities in the two metropolitan newspapers. The papers' content was examined for tone, type, and amount of coverage dealing with the two universities in this study. The sample was analyzed by using the archives of each newspaper's Web site.

Discussion

Delivery Methods

The results from the open-ended questionnaire supported the data presented in past literature. For newspaper writers, Cantelmo (2001) found that mail and fax were the preferred methods. In this study, the newspaper writers and PR practitioners were in agreement that the delivery methods most preferred were fax and e-mail in certain circumstances. Personal phone calls and pitches were the next most popular delivery method. However, the newspaper writers never acknowledged the university PR websites as a delivery method.

The most likely reason PR practitioners prefer fax and e-mail is the speed with which information can be delivered and the pervasiveness of the technology. Research has indicated that PR staffs are using fax and e-mail more readily because the news releases can be sent directly to the desired party (Zoulas, 2001), whereas press releases delivered via mail can get lost or discarded in the mailroom trash. As for the newspaper writers, fax and e-mail keeps the paper clutter to a minimum, while allowing the writer to perform a gatekeeping function by filtering through the press releases.

PR practitioners in this study used personal visits sparingly; however, studies have suggested personal visits should be utilized more often in PR (Kelley, 2000; Zoulas, 2001). Personal visits, although effective, are a less common method. In Zoulas's article, "College PR is about People not Technology," *Providence Journal* education writer Gina Macris wrote that although today's communication technology gives her the flexibility to work anywhere, personal contact is more rewarding. Because of the constant changes occurring in the newspaper business, studies have suggested that knowing who works certain beats and the needs of the newspaper is important for story placement (Gueder, 1995; Kelley, 2000). In this study, personal contact varied from one to three visits per year. The PR respondent from Institution A suggested that personal contacts are vital in PR, but cautioned that negative perceptions among PR professionals and newspaper writers could develop from too much personal contact with the newspaper. Defining "too much contact" is difficult. This varies with each individual; each PR practitioner must make a personal judgment as to the level of contact they have with the newspaper without appearing over-eager or unprofessional.

Respondents indicated that phone calls were the most popular PR method, which involving some degree of human contact. Phone calls normally only occurred when there was breaking news or if the story required more detail. For example, a phone pitch was useful in a situation that required the university to respond quickly, as in the firing of an administrator or hiring of a new university president. The phone pitch was also useful for stories that required more detailed information or the arrangement of possible subject interviews by the higher education writers. However, very few stories in higher education are breaking news stories or require additional research, therefore leaving phone calls to a minimum and instead using fax and e-mail as the main delivery method for news releases.

The PR method of media advisories was reported by the PR practitioners as useful in delivering news stories to the newspapers; however the method was not citied as tremendously effective in garnering published stories according to the newspaper writers. The media advisory is delivered via fax and e-mail and consists of a short list of upcoming events with little detail. If, after receiving the media advisory, the newspaper writer required more detail, he or she would need to contact the university PR department. One newspaper writer reportedly liked receiving the media advisories because the advisories helped the writer decide which events to cover or investigate further. However, the media advisory does not appear to be as useful as the simple press release. Though it assists the newspaper writers, the subjects in this study rarely referred to the media advisory. Finally, some studies have indicated that PR websites are playing a large role in delivering news releases to the media (Bowden, 1999). In this study, the newspaper writers never acknowledged a presence or using a university PR website in extracting institutional news.

Geographic Proximity

Morton and Warren (1992) identified localization as the main criterion in the news decision-making process. Kelley (2000) found that proximity and timeliness played a large role in newspapers' printing press releases from a midwestern university. In this study, according to the two newspaper writers, the most important news elements of a press release were proximity (locality) and timeliness. For example, the content analysis indicated that Newspaper A was more likely to print a story about Institution A than about Institution B mainly because of its proximity, whereas Newspaper B was more likely to print a story related to Institution B than to Institution A. The newspaper has a responsibility to sell newspapers by appealing to its readership, which requires writers and editors to post stories that have a direct impact on those within the proximity of the newspaper. The writer from Newspaper B admitted that more stories are written about Institution B because of the proximity of the institution to the paper.

However, Newspaper A was more balanced in total number of stories devoted to Institution A (23) and Institution B (16), whereas Newspaper B clearly provided more stories to Institution B (55) than to Institution A (25). Again, proximity played a role in the coverage, but Newspaper A appeared to have a more balanced approach in covering the two institutions than did Newspaper B. One possible reason may be that both universities have medical school facilities and branch extensions within the city limits of Newspaper A. Another explanation may be connected to the ownership of Newspaper B and their financial ties to Institution B. Critics and scholars have long worried about the power that media owners have in shaping the content of news coverage (Hollifield, 1999) and thus the public's agenda.

As for timeliness, the newspaper writers were concerned only with when the story occurred. In general, because of the nature of the daily newspaper, timeliness is a principal criterion in choosing a story for print, in addition to proximity.

PR Practitioner and Newspaper Writer Relationship

Studies have indicated that a positive relationship between the newspaper writers and the university PR practitioners can affect the communication process and coverage (Kelley, 2000). In this study, the newspaper writers and PR practitioners agreed that the working relationship was "respectful." The PR practitioner from Institution A described the relationship with Newspaper A as "adversarial," but also described the newspaper as being "fair" in its coverage of Institution A. The higher education writer from Newspaper A made it clear that maintaining a healthy relationship is a key to the university receiving press coverage when the university tries "to put forth the ideas that it believes have news value." Though research has indicated that newspapers depend on press releases to fill news holes (Murray, 1991), the burden of maintaining this relationship is on the PR practitioner. Newspapers receive hundreds of press releases from various sources; enough to fill the news holes, but the PR practitioner is responsible for getting their press releases chosen for publication from among the hundreds received by the papers each day. Thus, the PR staff must be precise and clear on the methods that work to maintain a good relationship with the media.

One of those methods was the ability to write an effective press release. Writing style is one of the most important communication skills of the PR practitioner (Ramsey, 1993). However, Aronoff (1975) found a common criticism by newspaper reporters that most press releases are not written correctly for print. As a result of the criticism, most universities require a journalism background for PR applicants. Many universities hire PR practitioners with journalism backgrounds, hoping to enhance the relationships with the newspapers. The two PR practitioners in this study have degrees in journalism news—one was a former journalist—and have been in PR for over 25 years, therefore giving the PR practitioners in this study a better understanding of the intricacies of the newspaper. In this study, it appeared that both PR practitioners' backgrounds had a positive, professional impact on their relationship with the two newspaper higher education writers.

The writer from Newspaper B suggested that the "obvious" is left out of some of the press releases; however, the two higher education writers suggested that the two university PR departments had a good understanding of the news criteria required to write an effective press release. Each university's practice of hiring PR staff with journalism backgrounds appears to be advantageous to the institution and its relationship with the newspaper, the quality of the press releases, and the understanding of the media's role in creating a favorable public opinion.

Tone of Coverage

Kelley (2000) studied the effectiveness of a midwestern university PR department and its ability to garner press coverage of research stories by two midwestern newspapers. He found the university PR department to be rather effective at acquiring favorable coverage in the two newspapers. The PR practitioner's responsibility is to provide and generate positive coverage; therefore, favorable coverage was likely because most, if not all, of the press releases from the PR practitioners were of a positive tone.

In this study, the majority of coverage by the two newspapers was generally favorable for both institutions; however, Institution A received significantly less favorable coverage (45.8%) than Institution B (80.3%). The most likely scenario for unfavorable coverage was when the newspaper writer investigated and probed into a firing, scandal, mismanagement of resources, or financial misappropriation. For example, negative coverage in this study included a researcher at Institution B failing to follow protocol and ethical guidelines in managing and conducting a cancer research project; subsequently, the state newspapers investigated further and exposed the injudicious errors of the administration overlooking the research. As for Institution A, one possible reason for its abundance of unfavorable coverage can be attributed to an accidental tragedy involving students and staff, which quickly spread through the local media and national news organizations. Shortly after the accident, several lawsuits were filed against Institution A, which became lead stories for the state's broadcast news organizations and newspapers for the next several months. In addition, further media scrutiny uncovered possible administrative mistakes that may have contributed to the accident. A number of studies have indicated that newspapers have a tendency to write about conflict in higher education (Kelley, 2000), but in this study a small portion of the stories were unfavorable.

Type of Coverage

Newspaper A was more apt to cover stories related to research and academics (20.5%), with community events and students a close second (17.9%). This may be explained by the fact that both Institution A and Institution B have medical school facilities near Newspaper A, therefore giving Newspaper A a local angle on much of the medical research being conducted at the two institutions. On the other hand, Newspaper B was more prone to cover stories related to community events (21.3%) (e.g., plays, musicals, free seminars, and workshops), with research and academics a relatively close second (16.3%). One likely reason that Newspaper B covered community-related stories more heavily is that the newspaper printed a special weekly column that covered community-related events that were sponsored by or took place at the institutions. The majority of the stories in the column were short in length and usually covered Institution B. Another possible factor in why Newspaper B covered more community-related stories could be attributed to the active theater and arts program at Institution B as well as the institution's other community-related programs. The university has a role to provide various enrichment programs to the community, thereby providing the PR department a steady news flow of community-related activities to be sent to the newspapers.

Proximity played a role in choosing which community-related stories were published. Newspaper A was more prone to cover Institution A events as Newspaper B was more apt to cover Institutional B events. This was expected, because the results of the open-ended questionnaire indicated that most of the coverage was in relation to the proximity of the university to the newspaper.

Amount of Coverage

A striking difference between the two newspapers was the total number of stories published. Newspaper A covered a total of 39 stories about the universities in the studied sample of a 5-year time period, in which 23 were attributed to Institution A (59%) and 16 to Institution B (41%). Though not equal, the distribution was more balanced for Newspaper A than for Newspaper B, which covered 71 stories in the same time period. Of the 71 stories published by Newspaper B, 55 were for Institution B (68.7%) and only

25 for Institution A (31.3%). Again, the difference may be attributed to the fact that Newspaper B is owned and operated by a prominent donor of Institution B and in the same metro area as Institution B. Despite this significant difference in the total number of stories written, the average total number of words per story (400) was very similar.

Another rather important finding was the inequality of amount of coverage between the two universities by the two newspapers. The content analysis revealed that Institution B received 71 stories with an average of 426.39 words a story, whereas Institution A received 48 stories with an average of 359.44 words per story. Multiplying the results revealed that Institution B received nearly twice as many words (30,273.69) in total coverage compared to Institution A (17,253.12) and therefore received nearly twice as much news coverage in the two newspapers overall.

Institution B's ability to create news may explain the inequality in coverage. During the 5-year period examined in this study, Institution B provided numerous community events to the public, and because the theater and art schools are so vibrant and lively at Institution B, more community events may have been available to be covered by Newspaper B. Of the total number of stories by Newspaper B, 21.3% were related to community events. Additionally, Institution B is a major research institution, therefore generates more news coverage in the area of research and grants than Institution A. Of the total stories by Newspaper B, 16.3% were related to research and academics. Finally, Institution B has been recognized for several major fundraisers that provided the resources for major construction projects on existing and new infrastructure, thereby creating additional press coverage. Of the total stories by Newspaper B, 11.3% were related to facilities. As mentioned earlier, Newspaper B provided 55 of its 71 stories to

Institution B (80.3%); therefore, it is possible that the majority of the stories in the aforementioned categories were for Institution B, therefore providing more words and coverage to Institution B. Again, it is important to mention that Newspaper B is owned and operated by a prominent financial donor of Institution B, therefore possibly creating a organizational climate to cover Institution B more than Institution A.

This outcome is important, because it supports the public perception that Institution B is more prominent and important to the state perhaps because it receives more coverage overall by the two state newspapers than Institution A. According to these findings, conventional wisdom is accurate and rather acute when examining the total number of words devoted to the two institutions by the state's major metropolitan newspapers. This may create a false reality that Institution A is less newsworthy, therefore possibly negatively impacting the image of Institution A. Ivy (2001) suggested that the university's perceived public image guides the "decisions of prospective students and scholars considering offers of employment, and federal agencies awarding grants" (p. 276).

Although the number of press releases written and distributed by Institution A and Institution B were not examined, it could be construed that the number of press releases produced by each institution can directly impact the number of stories published in the two newspapers. For example, if Institution B produces more stories on a daily basis than Institution A, it can be assumed that a larger proportion of the press coverage in the two newspapers will be granted to Institution B. Subsequently, the public perception will be that Institution B is more newsworthy and thus more important than Institution A. However, the opposite can be argued: Institution A is equally effective, but submits fewer stories. Unfortunately, neither program has a system to track the number of press releases sent or the number used by the two newspapers, so this question remains unanswered.

In conclusion, this study cannot determine what caused this inequality in coverage between the two universities, nor can it assess the effects of the unbalanced amount of public exposure on issues of public perception and institutional image. However, the results of this study do suggest a real advantage to Institution B overall, in that the institution received significantly more favorable coverage and more total coverage than Institution A. Newspaper B, which prints more educational stories overall and is in closer proximity to Institution B, may be driving this phenomenon. However, Newspaper B is also close to Institution A; therefore, PR staff at Institution A may have opportunities to lobby Newspaper B for more coverage. The findings herein may help them argue the need for more favorable coverage and more coverage overall.

Theoretical Implications

This study used the agenda-setting and gatekeeping concepts. The premise behind the agenda-setting concept is that the media attention toward stories is the most important factor involved in shaping the public's view of the stories' relative importance (Shaw & McCombs, 1977). Cobb and Elder (1972) looked closely at the agenda-setting concept and concluded that the conditioning of the public of particular issues in newspapers is a widely accepted function of the PR practitioner. Therefore, the agenda-setting theory was a foundation of this study.

Agenda-Setting Theory

One of the assumptions of this study was that the PR practitioner would attempt to shape the public image or set the public's agenda of the university by providing favorable press releases to the media. Though the actual press releases were not examined, the respondent from Institution A stated that the PR practitioner has a responsibility to "give the good news." Therefore the assumption is that most, if not all, of the press releases sent to the newspapers provided a favorable image, subsequently attempting to create a positive agenda in the minds of the public about the university. Studies have indicated that the newspaper industry is short on staff writers; newspapers need PR releases to fill the news gaps (Murray, 1991). Knowing this, the universities provide a large number of press releases spreading "the good news" to the newspapers in an attempt to control the public's agenda in relation to the respective universities.

According to the writer from Newspaper A, nearly 100 press releases are sent to his office a month. Concurrently, the writer from Newspaper B estimated that nearly 50 press releases from each institution are sent a month. The amount of press releases sent to the newspapers appears to be excessive, but it is advantageous to the university PR staff to bombard the newspaper with press releases to achieve recognition. Of press releases received in a newspaper office, some studies have indicated that as few as 3% are used by the newspaper (Morton & Warren, 1992). Unfortunately, neither institution in this study has a system in place to track the press releases that have been sent out and the number of them resulting in press. As a result, the university PR practitioners focus much of their resources on providing several stories a day to the two newspapers hoping to garner some positive press coverage on a daily basis. Thus, the PR practitioners attempt to set the agenda for the public.

Gatekeeping Theory

Lewin noted in his research that information has to pass through channels that have "gate areas" where decisions are made by impartial rules or personally by the "gatekeepers" (McQuail & Windahl, 1981, p. 100). Most of the research studies using the gatekeeping model have examined those who have control over the news and the criteria used in selecting the news that ultimately reaches the audience. The assumption in this study was that the newspaper higher education writers would, as gatekeepers, use a set of criteria to make news selections, thus controlling what the public reads in regards to the university.

Several factors influence the newspaper editor's decision to print a release. This study did not compare small newspapers to large newspapers, although one of the factors is the size of the newspaper. Smaller newspapers tend to use more press releases and print the information verbatim, whereas larger circulations use fewer press releases and edit them more frequently. This study examined large newspapers. The findings of this study show the most likely factors in deciding whether to print a story are proximity and timeliness. According to some studies, the criteria in the news selection process are not necessarily fixed and may vary from region to region (Cartmell, 2001). However, in this study, the higher education writers agreed that proximity and timeliness were the most important criteria when deciding the worthiness of a news story. As a result, the newspaper higher education writers play an important role as gatekeepers by largely focusing on current stories relating to the university in closest proximity. The newspapers' gatekeeping function may have a reverse effect on the university's public image by providing little or no coverage at all to the institution out of the newspaper's general proximity. Subsequently, the gatekeepers may promote the public perception that the more distant university is less significant. Although this tenet makes sense for most news subjects, in the case of the two major state universities, geographic proximity may not denote importance. The universities attract students from across the state and have alumni living in both metropolitan areas covered by the two newspapers. Furthermore, the universities are only a 90-minute drive apart, with Institution A an equal distance from the two metropolitan areas.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the PR practitioners at the two universities are efficient and effective, to some degree, in setting the agenda. A PR goal is to maintain a positive university image by communicating to the public through the media. As the content analysis suggested, the coverage of both institutions was predominantly favorable in the two metropolitan newspapers. Although the higher education writers at the two newspapers depend on the press releases to fill news holes because of the shrinking of news personnel and lack of resources, the PR staffs of the two institutions deserve credit for garnering the favorable coverage. The newspaper writers in the study complimented the PR staffs of both institutions on understanding their role and the ability to write effective press releases, therefore increasing the chance of getting a story printed. In addition, the PR writers have a strong sense of what is news and how to write a story by providing a local angle in a timely manner. The practice of hiring PR staff with journalism backgrounds at the two institutions has had a positive impact on their coverage. In the end, this practice should increase the ability to get press releases through the proverbial clutter and enhance the relationship between the university and the local media. However, to assist the PR staff in this process, the university PR website should play a more significant role in the PR function as studies suggest (Bowden, 1999).

The two main gatekeeping functions of the newspaper writers were identified by the responses to the questionnaire. The newspaper writers strongly agreed that proximity and timeliness were the two strongest factors in deciding to print a story. Though the knowledge of this will strengthen the PR staff's ability to write and prepare an effective press release, the negative impact is that the newspaper may print more stories related to the institution of closer proximity. The fairness of this practice could be of question; however, newspapers must sell papers to survive, therefore accommodating the local audience is nothing more than good business practice. The content analysis did support the fact that each newspaper tends to cover one institution over the other; however, Newspaper A was more balanced in their amount of coverage than Newspaper B, even though Newspaper B was geographically situated between the two universities.

Institution B received nearly twice the total coverage from the two newspapers, thus possibly creating the public perception that Institution B is more significant than Institution A. Both newspapers, in general, follow the same rules when filtering news stories, leaving the question as why Institution B received more coverage overall and what Institution A should do to enhance their visibility in the state.

The majority of the findings in this study were consistent with the literature posed in Chapter 2, however, past research suggested that fax and mail were the most widely used methods by PR practitioners (Cantelmo, 2001). In this study, the delivery methods most widely used by PR practitioners were fax and e-mail. The literature suggests that e-mail has lately surfaced as a useful and convenient method for PR practitioners to deliver their stories to the newspaper (Zoulas, 2001). In addition, past studies have indicated that web sites are playing a larger role in the delivery of PR releases to the media (Kelley, 2000). In this study, the higher education writers never mentioned either university's web site as a source for receiving press releases; suggesting that the university's web site may not be that significant in the PR process as the literature implies.

Limitations of Findings

The study is limited because the results are based only on the perceptions of the two higher education writers of the two newspapers and the two PR practitioners of the two state institutions. The results cannot be generalized beyond the sample provided in this study. The methodologies used in this are not scientific, therefore providing their own imperfections. In retrospect, the content analysis should have been performed first followed by the open-ended questionnaire. This will have provided the primary investigator with valuable data to better formulate the questions and enhance the continuity between the two methodologies. Finally, the primary investigator's methods of collection, coding and design are his own, thus containing inherent imperfections and therefore making it difficult to replicate this study.

Implications for Practice

Based upon the findings of this study, some implications for practice are suggested.

1. PR practitioners should make it a priority to visit the newspapers at least three to five times a year. Research has indicated that personal visits are strong in maintaining a good relationship (Zoulas, 2001); however this must be done without appearing partial to one paper. Through the increased personal visits, the PR practitioners can develop a better relationship with the higher education reporters by understanding the news criteria and other needs of the newspaper. Kelley (2000) suggested in his study that the midwestern university discover the needs of the newspaper by making more personal contacts.

2. The university PR departments should consider developing a system to track the number of press releases delivered and used by the two metropolitan newspapers. This will assist the PR staff in measuring their success through understanding the extent to which their releases are published and analyzing which stories are most likely printed. In addition, the information will assist the institutions in becoming more efficient in the operation of the PR department and its resources.

3. Newspaper writers and editors should reconsider their tendency to use proximity as a strong criterion when choosing story ideas for the universities. By using this practice, one newspaper inevitably gives one institution more coverage than the other, thereby potentially generating an inequality of importance in public perception of

the universities and creating the appearance that one newspaper favors a particular university over the other.

4. Institution A may want to reevaluate the effectiveness of their PR methods and strategies in garnering press coverage by the two state metropolitan newspapers. For example, the PR department may want to take an inventory of their resources and how they may be integrated to provide an optimum level of success in garnering press coverage from the two newspapers.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based upon the results of this study, there are five recommendations for further study on this subject:

1. Future studies should include the editors and their influence on the higher education reporters when making news decisions. Though studies have indicated that reporters have autonomy and flexibility when choosing stories to write, the editor has the last word.

2. Researchers may want to look closely at the public perception of the institution prior to a study. This will assist in better understanding the public image of the institution prior to performing a content analysis of newspaper coverage to test the agenda-setting concept.

3. Future research could contribute to a better understanding of the effect of external factors, such as educational training, cultural climate, and other sociological influences, on the higher education reporters' news selection process. This information would help delve deeper into the decision-making process in selecting news.

4. The press releases from the university PR department to the local newspaper could be tracked to examine if the press release is used verbatim or edited, and to what extent. This would provide valuable data to the agenda-setting and gatekeeping concepts.

5. Proximity appeared to be a factor in this study as well as others examining newspaper coverage of higher education (Kelly, 2000). Future studies could examine the role of proximity in covering higher education. Does being in closer proximity of a newspaper have a significant impact on the coverage of that newspaper? If so, is the objectivity of the news compromised if the practice inevitably gives one state institution more coverage than another?

Conclusion

By utilizing a mixed methodology, the investigator was able to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. The two methods used- open-ended questionnaire and content analysis- complimented each other by providing the investigator two forms of valuable data. This allowed the investigator to provide better conclusions and connections between the results of the two methodologies.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the PR delivery methods used by the two universities when soliciting press releases, the criteria used by the higher education writers in determining which stories get printed, and how those criteria influence the news coverage of the two universities by the two state newspapers. The study also examined the effect of the relationship between the university PR departments and the newspapers on the news coverage, and the tone, type, and amount of coverage.

One of the most important factors in an organization is image (Kazoleas et al., 2001). University administrations have acknowledged a need for a strong PR presence. As a result, PR has become a core element of university administrative functions (Lindsey, 1988). This study was undertaken to increase understanding of which methods are used, preferred, and most effective in setting the public's agenda in the news media. Results of this study and future research developed from this study can make the PR practitioner more effective by understanding the process and criteria newspaper editors and writers use in their news decision-making process. The content analysis of the newspaper coverage of the two state institutions for the past 5 years helped define the tone, types and amount of coverage attributed by the two metropolitan newspapers and revealed an inequality between the universities in amount of total news coverage. In addition, the outcome of this can help university administrators and PR personnel to communicate more effectively with newspapers about higher education issues and help ensure optimum results in the development of the universities image.

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Appendix A

PR Practitioners Open-Ended Questionnaire

Research Questionnaire

The following questions were specifically designed to answer the research questions for the PR practitioners participating in the study.

<u>RQ1: PR delivery methods used to communicate with the state's two metropolitan newspapers</u>

I. PR methods used to promote the university

a. What PR delivery methods do you use to communicate to the newspapers (For example, tip sheets, press releases, telephone calls, personal visits, fax or e-mail)?
b. Which of these PR delivery methods is used the most to communicate with Newspaper A and Newspaper B? Why?
c. How often do you pitch a story to the Newspaper A and Newspaper B?
d. How many visits a month do you make to Newspaper A and Newspaper B?
e. Approximately, how many press releases do you send to Newspaper A and Newspaper B?
f. Of the PR delivery methods used to communicate to Newspaper A and Newspaper B, what percentage do you think are press releases?

II. RQ 2: Most effective PR methods in gaining access in the two state newspapers

PR methods used to garner press coverage by the two metro newspapers.

a. What PR method appears to be the most effective in gaining the attention of the newspaper writer or editor? Why?
b. What PR method appears to increase the chance of the story getting printed? Why?
c. What PR method do you think the newspaper writer and editor prefer to receive from your office? Why?

<u>RQ 3: The criteria newspaper writers and editors use when deciding whether a story received by the university PR department gets printed</u>

III. Factors in the news selection process

a. What criteria do you think the newspaper writers and editors look for when making news selections?
b. Which of the factors in news selection do you think is the most important in choosing a story for print?
c. Do you think you have a good understanding of the elements the reporter or editor you work with want in a story?

RQ 4: The relationship between the university PR practitioner and the newspapers

IV. Quality of communication between PR department and newspapers

a. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Newspaper A?
b. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Newspaper B
c. How important is it to maintain a healthy relationship with the newspapers?
d. How does the relationship affect the PR functions of your office?
e. Do you find most of the press coverage by Newspaper A is favorable to the university?
f. Do you find most of the press coverage by Newspaper B is favorable to the university?

V. Demographic and Professional Information

a. You are: ______ male _______ female
b. Your age is :______ 24-35, ______36-45,______, 46-54,_______ 55-up
c. Your race: ________

1. White (non-Hispanic)
2. Black (non-Hispanic)
3. Asian or Pacific Islander
4. Puerto Rican
5. American Indian or Eskimo
6. Chicano/Mexican American
7. Other Hispanic
8. Biracial
9. Other____________

d. What is your highest degree earned?

_____ BA_______BS_______MA_______MS________Ed.D_______Ph.D

e. What was your degree major? (Journalism, Public relations, etc.)

____

f. How many years have you spent in your profession?

____

g. What is your current title or position?

____

Appendix B

Newspaper Writers Open-Ended Questionnaire

The following questions are specifically designed for the higher education writers participating in the study.

RQ1: PR delivery methods used to communicate with the state's two metropolitan newspapers

I. PR methods used to garner press coverage

a. What PR delivery methods do you prefer when receiving information from the university PR departments? (For example, tip sheets, press releases, telephone calls, personal visits, fax or e-mail)?
b. Which of these PR delivery methods is used the most by Institution A and Institution B?
c. How many visits a month does Institution A and Institution B make to the newspaper?
d. Approximately, how many press releases do you receive from Institution A and Institution B?
e. Of the PR delivery methods received from the universities, what percentage do you think are press releases?

RQ 2: The most effective PR delivery methods in gaining access in the two state metropolitan newspapers

II. PR methods used to garner press coverage by the two metro newspapers.

a. What PR delivery method appears to be the most effective in gaining your attention? Why?
b. What PR delivery method appears to increase the chance of the story getting printed in your paper? Why?

RQ 3: The criteria newspaper writers and editors use when deciding whether a story received by the university PR department gets printed

III. Factors in the news selection process

a. What criteria do you use when making news selections?
b. Which of the factors in news selection do you think is the most important in choosing a story for print?
c. Does Institution A have a good understanding of the criteria needed in a story?
d. Does Institution B have a good understanding of the criteria needed in a story?

RQ 4: The relationship between the university PR practitioner and the newspapers

IV. Quality of communication between newspapers and university PR departments

a. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Institution A?
b. How would you characterize the relationship between your office and Institution B?
c. How important is it to maintain a healthy relationship with the institution's PR departments?
d. How does the relationship affect your daily writing functions?
e. Do you find most of the press coverage by your paper is favorable to the Institution A?
f. Do you find most of the press coverage by your newspaper is favorable to the Institution B?

V. Demographic and Professional Information

a. You are: ______ male _______ female
b. Your age is :_______ 24-35, ______36-45,_______, 46-54,_______ 55-up
c. Your race: ________

10. White (non-Hispanic)
11. Black (non-Hispanic)
12. Asian or Pacific Islander
13. Puerto Rican
14. American Indian or Eskimo
15. Chicano/Mexican American
16. Other Hispanic
17. Biracial
18. Other____________

d. What is your highest degree earned?

_____ BA_______BS_______MA_______MS________Ed.D_______Ph.D

e. What was your degree major? (Journalism, Public relations, etc.)

____

f. How many years have you spent in your profession?

____

g. What is your current title or position?

____

Appendix C

Coding Schema for Content Analysis

Coding Schema for Content Analysis

Introduction

The following coding table was used to analyze the types of stories, tone of stories and the amount of coverage extracted from the content analysis of the two metropolitan newspapers coverage of the two state research institutions

Procedure

The following steps were conducted in the coding process of the response received in the survey (v = variable).

1v). *Newspaper Name*

Newspaper A= 1
Newspaper B= 2

2v). *Institution Name*

Institution A= 1
Institution B= 2

3v). *Tone of Story*

Code the tone of the story using the following tones:

01- Unfavorable Tone (disadvantageous to institutional image)
02- Neutral Tone (neither advantageous nor disadvantageous to image)
03- Favorable Tone (advantageous to institutional image)

4v). *Type of Story*

The coding for the type of story will be based on the following descriptions. Code the stories by using the corresponding numbers:

01- 01-Crime: An institutional entity that participated or is a victim of a past or current criminal investigation.

02- 02-Faculty/Administration: Adjunct and full-time faculty/staff and/or institutional administrators who are tied directly to the institution, past and present.

03- 03-Facilities: The moving, destruction, or building of facilities by professional contractors and other circumstances that directly impact the use of facilities.

04- Research/Academics: Research grants, medical research, curriculum, school research polls, and other related areas.

05- Legal: Litigation pending or filed against institutional entities.

06- Students: Former or present students of the university.

07- Policy: Stories emphasizing traditional institutional practices and processes. Examples include changes in enrollment, changes in traditional graduation requirements, student grievance process, and tenure.

08- Factual: Quantified documented data. Examples include semester enrollment numbers, history of the institution, location, address, and degrees granted.

09- Alumni/Donors: Stories relating to personal contributions, monetarily or personally. Examples include recognition of alumni at an award banquet, and personal and company donations.

10- Finances/Budget: State appropriations, fundraising, tuition hikes, salaries, and contracts.

11- Security: Measures taken for institutional and public safety.

12- Clubs/Organizations: Fraternities, sororities, and other institutional organizational activities.

13- Community events: Institutional programs and events open to the public as well as to university students, faculty, or staff. Examples include theatre and arts performances, seminars, guest speakers, panels, and field trips.

14- Other: Areas that have not been identified by the other categories.

5v.) *Amount of Coverage*

The amount of coverage will be measured by the total number of words. Code by using *Microsoft's word count* to get an accurate number of words in the story to measure the total coverage.

Appendix D

IRB Review Form

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 7/24/2004

Date: Friday, July 25, 2003 IRB Application No ED044

Proposal Title: AGENDA-SETTING AND GATEKEEPER FUNCTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE COVERAGE THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA AND OKLAHOMA STATE UIVERSITY RECEIVE IN THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN AND THE TULSA WORLD

Principal Investigator(s):

David Nelson
111 .W. 8th
Claremore, OK 74017

Jami Armstrong Fullerton
385-A North Hall OSU-Tulsa
Tulsa, OK 74106

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Vita (2)

David Allen Nelson was born November 15, 1967, in Savanna, Illinois. His father's lifelong military career allowed the family to travel extensively during his childhood. He lived in Alaska, California, Minnesota, and Illinois and finally rested in the state of Oklahoma. After attending public schools in Lawton, Oklahoma, he graduated with his B.A. in Radio/Television Communications (1992) from Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma. He received his first broadcasting position in Lawton at KSWO-TV, an ABC affiliate, while attending school. He held the position of sports photographer and production assistant. Shortly after, he added a weekend radio show to his résumé performing overnights at KMGZ-FM. After graduation from Cameron University he received a job at KQLI-FM in Lawton as the afternoon announcer and production director. While working fulltime in broadcasting, he began studying communications at the University of Oklahoma. During that period he held the position of midday personality, assistant program director, and sports director at KMGZ-FM, Lawton, and morning show news director at its sister station, KVRW-FM, Lawton. He received his master's degree in communications from the University of Oklahoma in 1996. He has also worked as an announcer at Oklahoma City's KMGL-FM and Houston's KPNT-FM. His teaching career began at Northwestern Oklahoma State University where he held the title of NWTV channel 7 Station Manager and Instructor of Mass Communications. He currently holds the position of Instructor of Mass Communications and Faculty Operations Manager of KRSC-FM at Rogers State University, Claremore, Oklahoma.