

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

A CASE STUDY ON HOW UNIVERSITIES IN WEST SOUTH CENTRAL STATES
THAT OFFER BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
PREPARE GRADUATES TO MANAGE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SITUATIONS
ONCE THEY ENTER THEIR PROFESSIONS

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jami Allee VanCamp
Norman, Oklahoma
2005

UMI Number: 3203288



UMI Microform 3203288

Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

A CASE STUDY ON HOW UNIVERSITIES IN WEST SOUTH CENTRAL STATES
THAT OFFER BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
PREPARE GRADUATES TO MANAGE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SITUATIONS
ONCE THEY ENTER THEIR PROFESSIONS

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

Frank McQuarrie, Committee Co-Chair

Courtney Vaughn, Committee Co-Chair

Neil Houser

Myron Pope

Elizabeth Willner

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by thanking God for everything he has provided. I am very fortunate and thank God everyday for his gifts. His greatest blessing is my warm and loving family. I thank God for my mother, Dorothy. The most exceptional woman I have ever known, her love and devotion have guided me through life. She is my inspiration. My mother is my role model and best friend. As my first teacher, my mother taught me many things, but most of all, to be open-minded and accepting of new ideas and concepts. I love her with all of my heart.

My Cousin Bob is also more than a family member. He is a friend and mentor. The kindest man I know, Cousin Bob is very much like his father. My Uncle Bob, a dedicated history teacher, would be proud of us both. I miss him. My Aunt Barbara misses him as well. I thank Aunt Barbara for showing me that women can be strong as well as gracious. She truly has been a great example to follow. I thank Uncle Ed and Aunt Lee. Their generosity made it possible for me to redirect my career in mid-life.

I have the greatest friends anyone could possibly hope for in life. Clara, Jeannie, Helen, Sally, and Mary are friends who have become family. These friends, who all weathered a tornado to attend my graduation, have consistently encouraged me to succeed in my quest for a doctorate. I thank Greg, Mark, Nita, Neff, and LaRue, who are integral parts of my family, for their love and support.

I thank my committee for providing me with the opportunity of a lifetime to learn from them. Dr. Vaughn challenged me to accept nothing but the best from myself and from others. Her wit and knowledge motivated me throughout the doctoral program. Dr. Vaughn has become a valued friend and I am privileged to know her. With her passion for education and sincere interest in students, Dr. Willner showed me that learning could be both exciting and creative. Her understanding of educational theorists and literature inspired me. Dr. Willner is a loving teacher. Dr. Pope taught me the value of teamwork. He is a great leader with wonderful people-skills. I learned so much from him. Dr. Houser encouraged me to dig deeper and to learn as much as possible. He taught me to approach learning from various angles. He was very motivating.

My final tribute is especially heartfelt. Dr. McQuarrie, the best advisor, teacher, and friend, was my greatest influence. His keen leadership and knowledgeable counsel guided me throughout the doctoral program. Not only did he teach me to conduct research and to write more clearly, he taught me to enjoy doing so. A scholar and a gentleman, Dr. McQuarrie motivates by example. His high standards, strong ethics, and nurturing manner, inspired me to strive for the best. I am honored to know him and am certainly a better person because of him. Dr. McQuarrie, who is the main reason I had a positive experience, encouraged me to enjoy the journey as much as the destination.

This truly has been the most energizing and fulfilling experience of my life. As I complete my doctorate, I look back with wonder and realize I truly have had the time of my life. As rewarding as it has been, I know there are even more challenging journeys ahead. As I chart the course for future travels, I know that this experience has prepared me for even greater adventures. The best is still yet to come!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
Abstract.....	viii
 CHAPTER I—Introduction	 1
Background of Study	1
Need for Study.....	4
Introduction of Research Question	8
 CHAPTER II—Review of the Literature	 10
Introduction.....	10
History—Public Relations Profession	10
The Teaching of Public Relations.....	19
Crisis Communication—Crisis Management in the Real World	27
Public Relations Society of America.....	32
Summary and Conclusion.....	35
 CHAPTER III—Methodology.....	 37
Introduction.....	37
Research Question	38
Methodology.....	38
Population and Sample	40
Table 1	42
Data Collection	44
Figure 1—Themes—Triangulation	46
Data Analysis.....	46
Figure 2—Themes—Individual Sets	48
Figure 3—Themes—Combined Sets	49
 CHAPTER IV—Findings of the Study.....	 50
Introduction.....	50
Summary of the Study	50
Descriptive Information and Common Themes for Each of Six Cases.....	52
University Red.....	52
Professor Red	53
Red Graduate I	53
Red Graduate II	54
Common Themes for University Red	54
University White	57
Professor White.....	57
White Graduate I	58
White Graduate II.....	58
Common Themes for University White	59

University Blue.....	61
Professor Blue	61
Blue Graduate I	62
Blue Graduate II	62
Common Themes for University Blue	63
University Green	66
Professor Green	66
Green Graduate I	67
Green Graduate II.....	67
Common Themes for University Green	68
University Yellow	70
Professor Yellow	71
Yellow Graduate I	71
Yellow Graduate II.....	72
Common Themes for University Yellow	72
University Orange	74
Professor Orange	75
Orange Graduate I	76
Orange Graduate II.....	76
Common Themes for University Orange	77
Common Themes Between and Among the Cases.....	79
Primary Themes.....	80
Secondary Themes.....	83
Notable Theme	86
CHAPTER V—Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations	88
Introduction.....	88
Summary of Findings	88
Background, Need for Study, Population and Methodology	88
Common Themes for Each of Six Cases.....	90
Common Themes Between and Among the Cases.....	91
Primary Themes	92
Secondary Themes	93
Notable Theme	94
Conclusions.....	94
Recommendations.....	99
Program Recommendations.....	102
Undergraduate Programs.....	102
Public Relations Professional Organization	104
Summary.....	105
References.....	107
Appendix A—Professor Interview Questionnaire	111
Appendix B—Graduate Interview Questionnaire.....	112

ABSTRACT

In our ever-changing, fast-paced and uncertain world, where the media reports stories with increased responsiveness, especially if the story is sensational, it is imperative that the public relations industry be prepared to manage crisis communications situations. This preparation begins at the university level. This study examines the question, “How are universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions?”

This multiple case study examines the research question. A multiple case study was used because it provided insight into how several universities were preparing baccalaureate public relations graduates for crisis communications situations. The West South Central region, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, was included in this study. During the content analysis phase of this study, the findings showed that no universities in Arkansas offered a crisis communications component to their public relations students; so Arkansas was omitted from the study.

After identifying two universities from Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, that offered a crisis communications component in their public relations programs, the study focused on one professor and two graduates from each institution. These six professors and 12 graduates were the primary data sources for this study. The supporting data sources were artifacts, which include crisis communications course descriptions, syllabi, textbooks, class assignments, and field notes. This triangulation of the data from one professor, two graduates, and several artifacts were considered a separate data set for

each of the six universities. This triangulation of information from these three sources provided the data for this study.

Nine themes were revealed in this study, including four primary, four secondary, and one notable theme. The four primary themes included internships, case studies, managing the media, and ethics. The four secondary themes included teamwork, public relations strategic planning, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSSA), and role playing. The notable theme included the benefit of having a minor with the major degree.

Concluding the study, four recommendations were made for future studies. The first recommendation focuses on crisis communications components sponsored by PRSSA at universities in the United States; the second recommendation replicates this study in another area of the United States; the third recommendation focuses on the 90 percent of universities in the West South Central region that do not offer a crisis communication component; and the fourth recommendation explores how ethics are incorporated into undergraduate public relations programs with a crisis communication component. In addition, there were two areas of program recommendations, with the first focusing on revisions for undergraduate programs and the second focusing on the leadership role of public relations professional organizations with undergraduate public relations programs.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background of Study

In our ever-changing, fast-paced and uncertain world, where the media reports stories with increased responsiveness, especially if the story is sensational, it is imperative that the public relations industry be prepared to manage crisis communications situations. Americans have learned to expect timely communication in the aftermath of a crisis. With heightened technology such as 24-hour news stations, pagers, cellular telephones, text messaging, and Amber Alerts, our society is increasingly connected to news sources. People are hungry for unfiltered, real-time coverage from real people's perspectives (Goodman & Goodman, 2004).

Technology has better enabled the media to readily learn of crisis situations, so public relations professionals need to quickly respond to their questions. In fact, one of the biggest concerns of school administrators during a crisis is to quickly communicate to their audiences, which traditionally include students, parents, the community and the media. Of particular concern is working with the media because it is essential that when reporters descend, school leaders know how to respond. Big and small, crises strike schools every day and the media is usually on hand to report the story. A crisis could include a pipe bursting which floods the first floor of an elementary school, a bus breaking down which prevents students from arriving home for several hours, or teachers and support staff going to the school board to ask for higher salaries (Cook, 2001).

Some crises receive local attention, some get statewide coverage and others become national stories all within a few minutes. Crisis communications has taken on a

new importance in the wake of more than 20 school shootings since 1997 (Cook, 2001). When combined with 24-hour news stations, the Internet as a news source, and ever-increasing competition among local affiliates, it is understandable how a media city could quickly be assembled on a school's premises.

In fact, in the first 24 hours after the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, the Jefferson County Public Schools logged 1,500 telephone calls from the media. Even though the district, which operates 145 schools, has its own telecommunications system, the lines were so jammed that cellular telephones were useless for large blocks of time (Cook, 2001). A temporary cellular tower was built in the media city and land lines eventually were installed at the area's crisis communications headquarters which was temporarily set up in the library.

Though advance preparation for a potential tragedy is key to the success of managing an actual crisis situation, few were prepared for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States. Meeting with his board of trustees just a few miles from the World Trade Center, David A. Caputo, the president of New York City's Pace University, revealed how his institution coped during the aftermath of the crisis (Caputo, 2001). Pace University, whose main New York City campus was only five blocks from the World Trade Center had housed its World Trade Institute in one of the now-obliterated twin towers. Nearly 8,000 students had been attending classes at their New York City campus, and they had more than 1,000 residential students in that area of lower Manhattan. They unfortunately lost four students and 34 alumni, but were relieved that all staff members managed to escape and that school facilities did not suffer extensive damage (Caputo, 2001).

They relocated nearly 60 students who had been living in Pace-leased housing facilities that because of the devastation and the massive cleanup effort, were unusable. Their principal loss came from the extensive damage done to the telephone and data-switching center serving both the World Trade Center and Pace University. They regained telephone service within ten days, but the Internet and other connections to some of their facilities remained sporadic for several months. The response of local public utilities was exceptional given the magnitude of the demands they had to deal with during and after the attack.

Just as the Columbine High School shooting and the Pace University September 11 terrorist attack, the public relations role was to lead the communications efforts in response to the crisis. The public relations directors of these two organizations were expected to have a crisis communications plan in place and to be prepared, available, and credible (Seitel, 1998).

Public relations professionals must be able to appropriately respond to a crisis on behalf of their organization. In order to provide proactive as well as reactive communication in a responsible and timely manner, public relations professionals must quickly and efficiently convey key message points to its audiences which include customers, employees, shareholders, the community and the media. With this growing demand for public relations professionals to take a lead role in managing crisis situations, it is essential for universities to respond to this demand by preparing public relations students when they enter the public relations field for real world experiences.

Need for Study

Although modern public relations is a twentieth century phenomenon, its roots are ancient. Leaders in virtually every great society throughout history understood the importance of influencing public opinion through persuasion. The American public relations experience dates back to the founding of the Republic. Influencing public opinion, managing communications, and persuading individuals at the highest levels were at the core of the American Revolution (Seitel, 1998).

The tenets of the public relations industry have been studied and practiced throughout history. Alan Leahigh (1993) summarizes prominent historical leaders' comments, which embrace the essence of the public relations profession. From Carl Jung who said, "We know that too often emotions, rather than reason, shape public opinion" (p. 24), to Abraham Lincoln who said, "Public opinion is everything; with public sentiment, nothing can fail and without it, nothing can succeed" (p. 24), historical leaders have recognized the influence of public opinion. Mark Twain took public opinion's influence a step further when he said, "Its name is public opinion and it's held in reverence." He continued, "It settles everything and some think it's the voice of God" (p. 25). Twain unknowingly endorsed the public relations profession's existence when he said, "As long as people kneel or tremble at the altar of public opinion, our livelihood is assured" (p. 25).

Edward Bernays, who taught the first course in public relations in 1923, is often called "one of the fathers of public relations." Bernays described his public relations firm as providing information given to the public, persuasion directed at the public to modify

attitudes and actions, and efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with those of that institution.

Fraser P. Seitel, an executive with Burson-Marsteller, which is the world's largest public relations firm, simply defines public relations as the practice of doing the right thing of performing, and communicating the substance of that performance (Seitel, 1998). Seitel believes that the public relations field has grown immeasurably in numbers and respect over the last two decades and today is clearly a growth industry. In the United States alone, public relations is a multibillion-dollar business practiced by nearly 200,000 professionals, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Seitel, 1998). Furthermore, the bureau ranks public relations as one of the fastest growing industries, with job growth between 1994 and 2005 projected at a nearly 47 percent increase. In a study of the chief executive officers of 200 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, communications in general and the practice of public relations in particular were highly valued (Grunig, 1990).

As the practice of public relations has developed, so too has the growth of public relations education. In 1951, 12 universities offered major programs in public relations. By 1998, 200 universities offered a public relations sequence or degree program and many more offered public relations courses (Seitel, 1998). In the vast majority of college journalism programs, public relations sequences rank first or second in enrollment. In the twenty-first century, while industries from banking to utilities to retailing are vulnerable to seismic movements, the public relations profession is expected to thrive, with more and more organizations interested in communicating their story (Liebert, 1996). At the end of the twentieth century, the United States government had 9,000 communication

workers employed by the United States Information Agency and the 20 largest public relations agencies generated nearly \$2 billion in fee income annually (O'Dwyer, 1996). As the field has increased in prominence, Seitel indicates that it also has grown in professional stature. The International Association of Business Communicators, a broad-based group that started with an internal communications focus, has 12,500 members. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), with a national membership of nearly 20,000 organized into 114 chapters, has accredited about one-third of its members through a standardized examination. The society also has investigated legal licensing, similar to that of the accounting and legal professions, for public relations practitioners (Seitel, 1998). PRSA, which was formed in 1947, defines the profession as, "Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other and is an organization's efforts to win the cooperation of groups of people" (Lesly, 1981, p.1).

In a study co-sponsored by the public relations division of the Association of Education and Journalism and Mass Communication, PRSA, and the educators' section of PRSA it is revealed that the public relations profession's strength stems from its roots. The study states, "Public relations began in a democratic society where people have freedom to debate and to make decisions in the community, the marketplace, the home, the workplace, and the voting booth. Private and public organizations depend on good relations with groups and individuals whose opinions, decisions, and actions affect their vitality and survival" (PRSA, 1987, p. 1).

The most significant test for any organization comes when it is hit by a major accident or disaster. How it handles itself in the midst of a crisis may influence how it is perceived for years to come. Poor handling of events with the magnitude of Pepsi-Cola's

syringe scare, Dow Corning's silicone breast implant controversy, NASA's shuttle disaster, Tylenol's capsule poisoning, or ValuJet's Everglades airline crash not only can cripple an organization's reputation but also can cause it enormous monetary loss (Seitel, 1998). It is essential, therefore, that such emergencies be managed intelligently and forthrightly with the news media, employees, and the community at large. One irrefutable key in crisis management is being prepared. If there is any certainty in dealing with crises, it's that accidents and disruptions make for spectacular headlines and sensational reporting. Reporters often march to a different drummer because they consider themselves the guardians of the public trust. Goodman (2004) depicts the need for a trickle-up media that reflects the true character of the United States and its people. As self-proclaimed guardians of public trust, the media may be quick to point fingers and assign blame in a crisis.

A crisis that had significant media coverage was the Alfred P. Murrah Building bombing in Oklahoma City in April 1995. With this incident occurring ten years ago in this West South Central state, it was recent enough to be on public relations educators' minds and long enough for them to have included a crisis communications component in their program. I researched the 21 universities that offer baccalaureate degrees in Oklahoma and this became the pilot for this study. Comparing Oklahoma's public relations programs, it was discovered that only two of the schools actually offered a crisis communications component. With organizational crises on the rise and with less than 10% of the state's universities providing public relations students with a crisis communications component in the public relations program, the supply and demand for crisis communications expertise was not in sync. The pilot study examined the

procedures these two universities used when teaching crisis communications and reviewed students' responses to the crisis communications component in their public relations program.

Following the pilot, PRSA was contacted to see if the organization had research on university public relations instruction. Even though PRSA has a staff that works with university public relations professors and students, there was not specific information related to the crisis communication component in public relations baccalaureate programs. In fact, Christina Darnowski, Manager of Professional Resources and Christopher Tearnio, Assistant Education Program Director both said, "[Jami], you are on to something" regarding my study of the crisis communications component in university public relations programs.

This study included the other three states in the West South Central region of the United States that offer crisis communications in their university public relations programs. The states that join Oklahoma to form the West South Central states include Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas (Cook, 2004). If employers are expecting their public relations staff to know how to manage a crisis situation, yet universities are not preparing their public relations students to handle a crisis, there is a problem.

Introduction of Research Question

Public relations students are customarily taught public relations theory, beginning with an introductory course and continuing throughout the coursework. Though theory is a key component in teaching college public relations courses, it is important to constantly connect theory and practice. Public relations theory lays the groundwork for

understanding the philosophy of public relations issues. However, it is actually the practice aspect of the curriculum that introduces students to real life experiences.

Student-centered socialized learning pedagogy, which encompasses small group discussion, role playing, client interaction, case studies and public relations campaigns, encourages students to utilize critical thinking and connect their knowledge of public relations theory to real life experiences (Lubbers, 2002). These experiences better equip public relations students to manage organizational situations when they enter the public relations profession.

Seitel (1998) indicates that navigating an organization through the shoals of a crisis is the ultimate test of a public relations professional. This study explored the question, “How are universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions?”

The next chapter provides an overview of public relations literature for this study of universities that offer baccalaureate programs in America’s West South Central states preparing public relations graduates to successfully manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter focuses on research regarding public relations and crisis communications and includes the following three sections: teaching of public relations, crisis management in the real world, and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The teaching of public relations section focuses on how public relations students at universities offering baccalaureate programs are being prepared for the public relations profession. Examples of crisis communications situations as well as recommended steps for public relations professionals to take in response to crises are reviewed in the section on crisis management in the real world. The final section on PRSA highlights the world's largest professional organization for public relations practitioners. A prelude to these three sections is an overview of the history of public relations, which provides a background on the public relations profession and presents an historical context for understanding theoretical positions regarding best practice.

History—Public Relations Profession

There were five prominent public relations historians identified in the literature. They were Scott Cutlip, James Grunig, Joe Marconi, Ron Pearson, and Fraser Seitel. Though all five are cited, Seitel, an executive with Burson-Marsteller, which is the world's largest public relations firm, presents the most comprehensive perspective of public relations history and will be the primary resource for this section of the literature review.

Grunig (1990) mass communication professor at the University of Maryland, identified Cutlip as the foremost historian of public relations. Cutlip, Dean Emeritus at the University of Georgia's College of Journalism and Mass Communication, stated that public relations began when people came to live together in tribal camps where one's survival depended on others of the tribe (Cutlip, 1995). He said that to function, civilization requires communication, conciliation, consensus, and cooperation, which are the bedrock fundamentals of the public relations function. Cutlip said, "I used to tell my students that public relations probably began when an Neanderthal man traded the hindquarters of a sheep to another for a flint" (Cutlip, 1995, p. x).

Cutlip said that even Greek philosophers wrote about the public will, though they did not use the term "public opinion." He explained that the urban culture of the Roman Empire gave more scope to the opinion process and that certain phrases and ideas in the political vocabulary of the Romans and in the writings of the Medieval Period are not unrelated to modern concepts of public opinion. In fact, Romans inscribed on their walls the slogan, "S.P.Q.R.," which stands for "The Senate and the Roman People" (Cutlip, 1995). Later the Romans coined the expression, "vox populi, vox Dei," which means, "The voice of the people is the voice of God," meaning people must be either caressed or annihilated (Cutlip, 1995). Cutlip explains the struggles to win in the public forum today may not be that brutal, but they are every bit as intense.

The communication of information to influence opinions or alter people's behavior goes back to the earliest civilizations. Archaeologists have unearthed farm bulletins in Iran dating back to 1800 B.C. teaching farmers how to sow their crops, how to irrigate, how to deal with field mice, and how to harvest their crops (Cutlip, 1995). This

was an effort very much like the “how to” information disseminated by our Land Grant Agricultural colleges over the Twentieth Century, which has made United States agriculture the envy of the world. What we know of ancient Egypt, Assyria, and Persia is primarily a result of recorded material intended to publicize and glorify their rulers. Much of the literature and art of antiquity was designed to build support for kings, priests, and other leaders (Cutlip, 1995).

Seitel explained that even the Catholic Church had a hand in the creation of public relations. In the 1600s, under the leadership of Pope Gregory XV, the church established a college of propaganda to “help propagate the faith.” Back then, the term propaganda did not have a negative connotation; the church simply wanted to inform the public about the advantages of Catholicism. Today, the Pope and other religious leaders have public relations personnel to assist with their communication to their publics. In fact, the Vatican’s chief communications official holds the rank of Archbishop of the Church (Seitel, 1998).

The American public relations experience dates back to the founding of the Republic. Influencing public opinion, managing communications, and persuading individuals at the highest levels were at the core of the American Revolution. The colonists tried to persuade King George III that they should be accorded the same rights as Englishmen. “Taxation without representation is tyranny” became their public relations slogan to galvanize fellow countrymen (Seitel, 1998). Thomas Paine, another early public relations practitioner, drafted pamphlets and essays encouraging the colonists to band together. In one essay contained in his Crisis papers, Paine wrote, “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this

crisis, shrink from the service of their country (Seitel, 1998, p. 26).” The public listened, was persuaded, and took action, which supports the power of early American communicators.

The practice of public relations gained momentum in the nineteenth century. A prominent, yet negative, outcome of public relations in the 1800s was press agency. Two historical public relations practitioners who notarized press agency were Amos Kendall and Phineas T. Barnum (Seitel, 1998). In 1829, President Andrew Jackson selected Kendall, a writer and editor living in Kentucky, to serve in his administration. Within weeks, Kendall became a member of Old Hickory’s “kitchen cabinet” and eventually became one of Jackson’s most influential assistants. Kendall performed White House public relations tasks. He wrote speeches, state papers, and news releases. He even conducted basic opinion polls and is considered one of the earliest users of the “news leak.” Although Kendall is generally credited with being the first authentic presidential press secretary, his functions and role went far beyond that position.

Among Kendall’s most successful ventures on behalf of Jackson was the development of the administration’s own newspaper, the *Globe*. Though it was traditional for the governing administration to publish its own national house organ, Kendall’s editorial touch refined the process to increase its effectiveness. Kendall would write a news release, distribute it for publication to a local newspaper, and then reprint the press clipping in the *Globe* to underscore Jackson’s nationwide popularity. Jackson gave credit for his popularity during his administration to Kendall, who we would now call a public relations advisor (Seitel, 1998).

Some public relations professionals today might not be enthused that Barnum was an industry pioneer. Barnum was a huckster, whose motto could have been, “The public be fooled.” While Barnum may have had his faults, at the time he was respected as a user of written and verbal public relations techniques to further his museum and circus. In the 1800s, Barnum wrote several news paper articles promoting his circus. He strategically gave his star performing acts short names such as Tom Thumb, the midget, and Jenny Lind, the singer so that they could easily fit into the headlines of narrow newspaper columns. Barnum also staged unusual events, such as the legal marriage of the fat lady to the thin man, to drum up free newspaper exposure. And, although some public relations professionals criticize Barnum’s techniques, some press agents still utilize them. Barnum is often blamed by public relations personnel for the huckster image that the profession sometimes has (Seitel, 1998).

The American Industrial Revolution ushered in the growth of public relations. The twentieth century began with small mills and shops, which served as the center of the frontier economy, giving way to large factories. Small towns, which had been the centers of commerce and trade, were replaced by large cities. Limited transportation and communications facilities became nationwide railroad lines and communications wires. Big business was in control. The men who owned America’s industries seemed more concerned with making money than with improving the lifestyles of their fellow citizens. Bankers like J.P. Morgan, oil tycoons like John D. Rockefeller, railroad owners like William Vanderbilt, and steel factory owners like Henry Clay Frick controlled the livelihood of thousands of employees and customers. An example of the greedy and insensitive reputation this industrialist group had was when Vanderbilt was asked about

the public's reaction to him closing the New York Central Railroad and he said, "The public be damned!" (Seitel, 1998, p. 29).

Americans criticized Vanderbilt and his counterparts and called them robber barons because they didn't care for the rest of society. Those who depended on these industrialists for their livelihood felt powerless to rebel. The robber barons' greed ended when a group of journalists called "muckrakers" investigated the industrialists. The muck that these reporters and editors raked was dredged from the scandalous operations of America's businesses. Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, revealed the deplorable conditions of the meat-packing industry and Ida Tarbell's *History of the Standard Oil Company*, dispelled the reputable image of a leading petroleum firm (Seitel, 1998).

Sensational stories written by these journalists led to legislative reform. As journalists and the public became more anxious, the government got more involved. Congress began passing laws telling business leaders what they could and could not do. Conflicts between employers and employees broke out, and newly organized labor unions were formed. Free enterprise was gaining momentum, but so was public opinion against business freedom, primarily because of the breakdown in communications between the businessman and the public. For a time, these men of inordinate wealth and power found themselves limited in their ability to effectively defend themselves and their activities against the public. To tell their side of the story, the business barons first tried using advertising to silence journalistic critics. They tried to buy off critics by paying for ads in their papers. When this strategy didn't work, they paid press agents to present their companies' positions but the public saw through this approach (Seitel, 1998).

Business leaders realized that a corporation might have capital, labor, and natural resources, yet be doomed to fail if it lacked intelligent management, particularly in the area of influencing public opinion. They discovered that the best way to influence public opinion was through honesty and candor and this simple truth was the key to the accomplishments of American history's first successful public relations counselor, Ivy Lee (Seitel, 1998).

Lee was a former Wall Street reporter who plunged into publicity work in 1903. Lee believed in neither Barnum's the-public-be-fooled approach nor Vanderbilt's the-public-be-damned philosophy. For Lee, the key to business acceptance and understanding was that the-public-be-informed. Lee firmly believed that the only way business could answer its critics convincingly was to present its side honestly, accurately, and forcefully. Instead of merely appeasing the public, Lee thought a company should strive to earn public confidence and good will. Sometimes this meant looking further for mutual solutions and other times, it meant admitting that the company was wrong. In 1914, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who headed one of the most maligned and misunderstood of America's wealthy families, hired Lee. In working for the Rockefellers, Lee tried to humanize them, to feature them in real-life situations such as playing golf, attending church, and celebrating birthdays. Lee's goal was to present the Rockefellers in terms that every individual could understand and appreciate. Years later, despite their critics, the family came to be known as one of the nation's outstanding sources of philanthropic support. Lee is traditionally recognized for bringing honesty and candor to public relations. More than anyone before him, Lee transformed the field from a questionable pursuit into a professional discipline designed to win public confidence and trust through

communications based on openness and truth. After he established the idea that firms have a responsibility to inform their publics, the practice began to grow in every sector of American society (Seitel, 1998).

Another industry pioneer was Edward Bernays, who died in 1995 at the age of 103, and was a giant in the public relations field for nearly a century. Beginning as a publicist in 1913, he owned a public relations firm and taught the first course in public relations at New York University in 1923. A nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays pioneered the application of the social sciences to public relations. Historian Eric Goldman credited Bernays with moving along with the most advanced trends in the public relations field, thinking with, around, and ahead of them (Seitel, 1998).

Interestingly, the public relations profession experienced one of its most significant leaps when business confidence suffered its most severe setback. The economic and social upheaval caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s provided the impetus for corporations to seek public support by telling their stories. Public relations departments sprang up in scores of major companies, among them Bendix, Borden, Eastman Kodak, Ford, General Motors, Standard Oil, Pan American, and U.S. Steel. The role that public relations played in helping regain post-Depression public trust in big business helped project the field into the relatively strong position it enjoyed during World War II (Cutlip, 1994).

Disenchantment with big institutions peaked in the 1960s. The conflicts during the early part of the decade between private economic institutions, especially large corporations, and various disenfranchised elements of society arose from long-standing grievances (Grunig, 1989). The social and political upheavals of the 1960s dramatically

affected many areas, including the practice of public relations. The Vietnam War divided the nation. Ralph Nader began to look at the inadequacies of the automobile industry. Women began to form activist groups such as the National Organization of Women. Environmentalist began to support groups such as the Sierra Club. Minorities began to petition and protest for their rights. Homosexuals, senior citizens, birth control advocates, and social activists began to challenge the legitimacy of large institutions. Not since the days of the robber barons, had large institutions so desperately needed professional communications help (Seitel, 1998).

The 1970s and 1980s brought a partial resolution of these problems. Business began to contribute to charities. Managers began to consider community relations a first-line responsibility. This new social responsibility continued into the 1990s. Corporations realized that their reputations were a valuable asset to be protected, conserved, defended, nurtured, and enhanced at all times. Institutions in the 1990s had little choice but to get along with their publics. By 1994, 93 million American homes had television, with 61 percent of the homes wired with cable. As the country moved into the twenty-first century, the potential for two-way communication arrived. Not only have cable, satellite, fax, and computers revolutionized the information transmission and receiving process, but the emergence of the Internet radically intensified the spread of communications even further into the new millenium (Seitel, 1998).

Clearly, the public relations profession has been prevalent in the history of our country's government, business and societal arenas. This historical perspective on the public relations industry is especially helpful in understanding how the profession is evolving and how it should be taught to future professionals at our universities. The

college curriculum is key to public relations students connecting theory to practice and to having a solid understanding of real life situations in their profession.

The Teaching of Public Relations

While this study focuses on the inclusion of the crisis communications component in university public relations baccalaureate programs, very little literature was found related to this topic. Therefore, studies relating to teaching public relations will be primarily examined in this section. Many educators believe that the ideal academic environment for theory is the college campus where the chief concern is preparing students for leadership in their chosen profession. This philosophy which was once a belief of Donna Vocate, an adjunct mass communication professor at Boston's Emmanuel College, was dispelled when she made the transition from teaching mass communication theory to undergraduate students to teaching graduate students. Vocate conducted research that focused on the university mass communication department, which traditionally is the location of public relations studies as well as journalism and advertising concentrations (Vocate, 1997).

According to Vocate, a mass communication theory course would include public relations history, communications ethics, media relations, communications technology, public perception and persuasion, and international communications. Vocate interviewed mass communication professors from the top ten universities in the United States with the largest mass communication student enrollment. These professors had expertise in curriculum planning and reform and shared their views on teaching theory. In addition, all had authored popular mass communication texts with a theory component, and were

currently teaching theory. The underlying query was whether or not communication theory should be taught at universities and the unanimous response was, “yes.” The respondents’ class assignments supported the anticipated outcome that studying theory facilitated critical thinking because all required an analytical application of theory. For example, one professor assigned two or three case studies, which called for an application of theory as well as a midterm and a final. Another professor required students to apply theory to a communication problem, while some students have expanded their short weekly paper into a term paper.

Vocate revealed that the mass communication professors’ rationale for theory instruction was varied but they all agreed that such study provided a foundation of knowledge, an understanding of processes and a framework of strategies (Vocate, 1997). Concluding, Vocate condensed all of the varied arguments for teaching communication theory into one single proposition stating that teaching a rigorous course in mass communication theory increases the students’ intelligence. She also believed that, given the complexity of the field, no one could argue that the United States had no need of intelligent practitioners in the communication industry (Vocate, 1997). Even if students have acquired the ability for critical thinking, the greatest aspect of reflective intelligence, according to Vocate, is that it can be developed further through the process of human communication in a rigorous theory class.

Another method for teaching a mass communication theory course at the college level is with ever-evolving and ever-improving technology. The use of new media communication tools within the college classroom has become widespread and will continue to grow. Daniel Panici, assistant professor of mass communication at the

University of Southern Maine, conducted a survey of college computing services. A survey was sent to all 203 department chairs belonging to the Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism and Mass Communication. The survey posed questions concerning the integration of new media technologies in the classroom and personal experience with this situation.

The study revealed that 25% of college courses use electronic mail and that the usage of other communication tools such as computer simulations, multimedia materials, CD-ROMs, the Internet and the World Wide Web were on the rise (Panici, 1998). The results of the survey also indicated that faculty teaching the introductory mass communication course spend a considerable amount of time talking about new media in their introductory course. The time spent discussing new media ranks third behind the discussion of the television and newspaper industries (Panici, 1998).

While teaching the introductory mass communication course clearly encompasses a theoretical approach using the discussion method and state-of-the art technology, no matter what, leading educators agree that a real world, interactive, client-centered approach is essential to students gaining practical knowledge of the public relations profession. Melissa Motschall, English Language Department at Eastern Michigan University and Michele Najor, Mass Communication Department at Wayne State University wrote an article describing their client-centered approach to teaching the introductory mass communication course which they believe serves as an entrée to both theory and practice. With both universities located in metropolitan Detroit, the authors explain that public relations graduates often go to work in public relations agencies, corporations, and nonprofit organizations. Motschall and Najor (2001) agree that their

most successful students have substantial writing portfolios before they graduate and that the introductory course serves as a starting point for building portfolios and for demonstrating students' knowledge and skill level in public relations (Najor & Motschall, 2001).

The introductory public relations course strives to successfully blend theoretical concepts with their professional and practical applications and in general, the orientation of an entire undergraduate public relations program or curriculum should reflect this same effort to blend theory with application (Motschall & Najor, 2001). According to Motschall and Najor, objectives for the introductory mass communication course include: 1) to study the history and evolution of public relations as a profession; 2) to enhance students' abilities to analyze and determine the effectiveness of public relations strategies and tactics; 3) to provide opportunities for students to perform many of the fundamental tasks of entry level public relations practitioners; and 4) to increase students' critical thinking skills by allowing them to respond to practical public relations situations.

In order to provide students in the introductory mass communication class with the appropriate breadth of knowledge of public relations, Motschall and Najor (2001) cover the function and foundation of public relations which includes the following nine areas of knowledge: 1) definition; 2) history; 3) identity and image; 4) ethics; 5) theory; 6) research; 7) program planning; 8) publicity; and 9) crisis management.

It is the ninth area of knowledge, crisis management, which is such a volatile aspect of the public relations profession and is imperative for mass communication students to fully understand the concept of effectively working in a reactive mode. According to Motschall and Najor, once students have a firm grasp on the program

planning process and are actually engaging in the practice of public relations with their client, they are ready to prepare for the inevitable challenges and crises that their organizations will face. Crisis management is another content area that can be taught effectively by applying the response-oriented approach. One trend in public relations is certainly from fire fighter to fire preventer (Motschall & Najor, 2001). Here, it is important to distinguish between crisis management and the concept of issues management and to impress upon students the importance of being proactive rather than reactive in their planning strategies.

According to Motschall and Najor, students should know general principles of crisis communications, such as honest and open communication. They should also understand the importance of having in place a crisis plan, crisis team, and single spokesperson. With these guidelines in mind, requiring students to respond to a real crisis for their clients, within a specified time frame, can be a valuable and interesting exercise (Motschall & Najor, 2001). Students can either create crises for one another, or the instructor may develop a bank of crises and opportunities from which to draw. Again, this approach allows students to respond to practical public relations situations, an important objective of the introductory public relations course. Motschall and Najor believe that instructors who use the broad-based, client-centered model in teaching the introductory public relations course can feel confident that it will give students a solid beginning to a comprehensive public relations educational experience.

One method of teaching crisis communications to mass communication students is by using the case study method. Begun in the early part of the twentieth century, the Harvard managerial-oriented case studies have evolved into prestigious exercises often

involving semester or year-long examinations of organizations through detailed analysis of culture, structure, product introduction and suspension, crises and the like (Adams, 1993). William Adams, Associate Professor at Florida International University School of Journalism and Mass Communication, believes the reasons to encourage more emphasis on team participation cited by a number of scholars include benefits derived from the socialization of group interaction; alleviation of the Atlas Complex where the instructor tries to do it all, risking ineffectiveness and burnout; and the opportunity for students to face group related problems they will encounter when entering the field. Adams believes case studies serve as idea resources for public relations practitioners in solving problems and for public relations scholars in theory building. He also believes that through class discussions of the situations and people in the cases, students will hone their insights, perceptions, thought processes and interpersonal skills.

Following are five ways which Adams has tried to make teamwork case studies effective during the introductory mass communication course he teaches at Florida International University: 1) begin with the theoretical underpinnings of public relations practice, including early exposure to the need for research and process in the field; 2) students are encouraged to read ahead in the text and become familiar with all case studies cited in the assigned chapters before coming to class; 3) by the third week, the team concept is explained and the first groups are self-formed; 4) teams are kept to four to seven participants, if possible; and 5) depending upon the individual case study and time left for the assignment, teams are asked to meet back in the classroom at a specified time, with their solutions to the cases.

In addition to Adams' five-point policy, he reveals that grades are given with as much emphasis on participation as on process and answers themselves. Weekly cases count for about one-quarter of their semester grade and the overall team grade is the participants' grade for the assignment. While there are no universal ground rules for answering the questions, students are expected to show public relations process in their work, relating answers to what they have learned in lectures, from guest speakers, in text chapters and handouts and in assigned outside readings, (Adams, 1993). Concluding his paper, Adams suggests that case studies can help bridge the gap between theory and practice, which is a goal he believes all public relations educators should strive.

As the capstone course in public relations education, the campaigns course bears a significant responsibility to both the student and the profession. Vincent Benigni, assistant professor of mass communication at the College of Charleston and Glen Cameron, professor of journalism at the University of Missouri, believe that the most important function of capstone courses in journalism and mass communication is to prepare students for the real world. They further believe that as public relations education has shifted from being a variant of a liberal arts degree to training for a profession, the campaigns course must supplement the skills training for the technician role with managerial values and skills. Future practitioners need to possess real world communicative and planning skills, while basing their strategies on substantive case studies, sound research, and theoretical underpinnings (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). Benigni and Cameron believe that campaign courses should be designed to hone practical skills such as research and planning as well as incorporate theoretical significance.

Benigni and Cameron conducted a study surveying mass communication professors from 280 American universities that offered public relations undergraduate degrees. The study focused on the current state of the art for teaching public relations campaign courses. The respondents were selected through the 1997-98 Association for Education in Journalism as well as the Mass Communication Directory of Colleges and Universities. With 99 surveys returned, there was a 35% response rate. A general description of the sample denotes that 83% of responding universities offer a stand-alone public relations campaigns course. About 59% of the campaigns classes are available to undergraduates only, with 40% being cross-listed. About 50% of juniors, 97% of seniors and 40% of graduates are permitted to take the campaigns course. Most significantly, 87% of the respondents stated that campaigns was the capstone course for the mass communication major.

Often, demographics of a class structure play a pivotal role in setting the tone (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). The average campaigns class size, according to the survey, is about 20, which allows the teacher the flexibility to form small work groups and still have an overall manageable number to supervise as a whole, or to assemble in lectures. Of the respondents, 67% used a team-based approach, while 19% focuses on individual campaigns. The majority of respondents described their teaching methods as lecturer, adviser and coach but not significantly as coordinator which could imply that a pedagogical strategy emphasizes student/team autonomy rather than a didactic approach directed by the professor. Lectures were not a predominant pedagogical tool, as less than 33% of class time was devoted to lectures, compared to 40% for team/individual meetings and 26% for other strategies.

While textbooks offer research tips and comparative case studies, the campaigns course should be designed to immerse students into real world strategy and planning. A promising finding was that 92% of the students enrolled in the campaigns course work with actual clients. About 50% work with case studies and 25% work with hypothetical clients. While 78% of respondents required outside readings, only 33% of all teachers required readings on mass communication theory, which is considered a crucial element of the public relations curriculum (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). However, 88% of respondents required a research element in the campaigns course and 96% stated that students are required to develop a strategic plan and 75% of professors required documentation of survey results in the final plan.

Clearly mass communication theory is essential, though study after study encourages professors to develop a curriculum emphasizing the practice aspect of the profession. By putting students into teams where they analyze case studies and public relations campaigns and then actually take on the persona of these practitioners in hypothetical role playing, students are encouraged to think critically, as well as connect and apply their knowledge of public relations theory to real world experiences.

Crisis Communications—Crisis Management in the Real World

The most respected and highest paid professionals in the public relations industry have achieved this status through their efforts in attempting to manage crises (Seitel, 1998). In a world of instantaneous communications, tabloid news journalism, and exploding communications challenges, the number and depth of crises affecting business, government, labor, nonprofits and even private individuals have expanded exponentially.

Before we can evaluate crisis management in the real world, we must first understand the nature of a public relations crisis. There are almost as many definitions as crises themselves but Ruff and Aziz (2003) simply and effectively sum it up with the following: “A crisis is any incident or situation, whether real, rumored or alleged, that can focus negative attention on a company or organization internally, in the media or before key audiences” (p. 3). In the case of a company that offers shares to the public, a crisis could be anything that would potentially have an impact on the share price. For other organizations, a crisis could be anything that would actually, or potentially damage their reputation.

The precise nature of an emergency situation might be hard to anticipate but research shows that during the 1990s in the United States, of all crisis events reported in the media, there were two clear categories: events that were “sudden” and those that were “simmering” (Ruff & Aziz, 2003). Sudden events encompass accidents and emergencies, acts of terrorism, mechanical breakdowns, a hostile take-over or some unexpected legal action. Simmering events cover situations that lurk beneath the organization’s surface and can erupt into a crisis at any time. Industrial unrest, criminal actions of varying types and inefficient management would all fall into this category. An interesting element of companies’ and organizations’ perspective in crisis management is their general assumption that a crisis will be sudden and unexpected whereas, in reality, it is much more likely to be predictable and expected (Ruff & Aziz, 2003).

Though most crises are likely to be predictable and expected, it is important to understand unpredictable crises. Lerbinger (1997) identifies seven definable types of

sudden emergencies in his book, *The Crisis Manager: Facing Risk and Responsibility*.

These include:

- *Natural disasters*: fires, explosions and bad weather.
- *Technical disasters*: spillage and faulty equipment.
- *Crises of confrontation*: industrial disputes or the development of opposition by single-issue external groups.
- *Acts of malevolence*: terrorism, sabotage and kidnapping.
- *Misplaced management values*: strategic investment errors and ignoring investors' concerns.
- *Acts of deception*: fraud, expenses scams and false invoicing.
- *Management misconduct*: harassment, bribery, corruption. (p. 5)

Whether a crisis is predictable or unpredictable, there are three possible outcomes of an organizational crisis: 1) the organization is put out of business, ruined, possibly sued, and key executives possibly charged with crimes; 2) the organization continues to exist, but it has lost some image and respect in its publics' eyes, and perhaps a great deal of financial position; and 3) the organization, in a hard-fought battle, has won a war of public opinion and is seen as favorably as before or perhaps more favorably (Fern-Banks, 2002).

The key to crisis management is developing a plan prior to the crisis that manages various public perceptions of the crisis. An effective crisis management plan is a well-thought-out campaign that seeks to reduce any negative impact, while generating positive outcomes during a crisis period (Lin, Stacks, & Steinfatt, 1992). Traditionally, good crisis management includes three elements: 1) a plan of action; 2) an early warning

system in place to signal potential crisis situations; and 3) a crisis management team in place with the power to act (Millar & Heath, 2004). Once a crisis has occurred, following are ten recommendations in implementing the crisis management plan:

- Develop a clear, straightforward position.
- Involve top management to show hands-on involvement.
- Activate third-party support from objective party with credentials to help.
- Establish an on-site presence at the location of the crisis.
- Centralize communications to one point person who will act as the spokesperson.
- Cooperate with the media and make them friendly adversaries.
- Keep employees informed; they are the company's greatest allies.
- Keep the crisis in perspective. Often management under reacts at the start and overacts as the crisis builds.
- Begin positioning the organization for the time when the crisis is over.
- Continuously monitor and evaluate the process by taking the pulse of employees, customers, suppliers, distributors, investors, and the general public. (Seitel, 1998, p. 460)

According to Ruff and Aziz (2003), in a crisis the communication usually will be oral rather than written, so it is worth highlighting what this means in practical terms. Traditionally, in the public relations profession, verbal communications consists of three elements:

- 1) The message points (preferably no more than three key items); 2) the audience (the people at which the messages are aimed); and 3) the medium (the method of delivering the messages to the audience). Of these three elements, the audience is

vastly more important than the other two elements put together. For instance, it really does not matter how good the messages are or how good the medium of delivery is if the public relations professional has misread the audience. In a crisis, speedy communications to many audiences simultaneously is especially crucial. (Ruff & Aziz, 2003, p. 41)

Information about a crisis reaches the public through the media more than through any other means. An organization may have to work very hard to get the media's attention during good times. In fact, public relations personnel may struggle even to get a positive news release published. However, during times of crisis, the media willfully find the public relations personnel. Unfortunately, bad news sells. Even Shakespeare wrote about it in *Julius Caesar* when he said, "The evil men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones" (Fern-Banks, 2002, p. 65).

With the media wanting a quick response to a crisis, it is important for the public relations professional to anticipate what the media want to know. Looking at the big picture, the media want to sell newspapers and win ratings wars. The media often give the public what it wants to know rather than what it needs to know. There is a fine line between news and entertainment and crises make for entertaining news. Following are potential questions that the media could ask following a crisis:

- What happened?
- Were there any deaths or injuries?
- What is the extent of the damage?
- Is there a danger of future injuries or damage?
- Why did it happen?

- Who or what is responsible?
- What is being done about it?
- When will it be over?
- Has it happened before?
- Were there any warning signs of the problem? (Fern-Banks, 2002, p. 67)

A simple but accurate piece of advice for public relations professionals in communicating to their audiences after a crisis comes from Steve Wilson, a former reporter for *USA Today*, who said, “Time and time again, it seems that organizations that own up to their mistakes fare well in the court of public opinion, if not the legal courts as well. Sometimes, the best crisis strategy is to simply apologize” (Wilson, 2002, p. 159).

Public Relations Society of America

This section of the literature review focuses on the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), which is the world’s largest professional organization for public relations practitioners. The first part of this section provides an overview of PRSA, including its mission and membership benefits such as professional development seminars. The next area of this section focuses on PRSA’s 18 professional interest sections designed to focus on specialized practice areas like the Educators Academy, which provides services to university public relations professors. The final part of this section introduces the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), which is the student affiliate of PRSA.

Headquartered in New York City, New York, PRSA's nearly 20,000 members are organized into 114 chapters and the membership represent business and industry, counseling firms, government, associations, hospitals, schools, professional services firms and nonprofit organizations. Chartered in 1947, PRSA's primary objectives are to advance the standards of the public relations profession and to provide members with professional development opportunities through continuing education programs, information exchange forums and research projects conducted on the national and local levels (<http://www.prsa.org>).

One of the ways PRSA provides an in-service benefit to public relations graduates who are already working in their professions is through professional development seminars. These seminars, which are usually targeted to mid-level and senior-level public relations professionals, feature intensive hands-on learning experiences. The goal of the seminars is to make public relations professionals more knowledgeable and confident by providing new skills and creative approaches for dealing with challenging situations.

One of PRSA's 2005 seminar topics is *Crisis Communications Strategy*, which is most directly associated with this study. This upcoming crisis communications seminar will offer experiential learning for participants. Using case studies, seminar participants will explore a series of crisis communications management problems and strategies while immersed in management struggles, decision-making, and moral challenges managers face (<http://www.prsa.org>).

Though the crisis communications seminar is broad-based and could appeal to most organizational public relations professionals, some topics are more specific and

apply to specialized areas. Thus, PRSA has developed 18 professional interest sections designed to focus on issues, trends, and research in specialized practice areas. These professional interest sections offer programs that are relevant to professionals who work in a specific industry, like healthcare, finance, and tourism. Members design and participate in seminars and conferences with speakers and topics that appeal to their interest areas.

One of these professional interest sections is the Educators Academy, which focuses on university public relations professors and offers seminars on teaching issues, techniques, and scholarly research, as well as research on the role, function and status of undergraduate and graduate public relations education. The primary resource for the Educators Academy is a book titled, *Learning to Teach: What You Need to Know to Develop a Successful Career as a Public Relations Educator* (Sallot & DeSanto, 2004). With 537 pages, 56 chapters, and more than 30 contributing writers, the book provides an overview of the educator's role and function, public relations curriculum, general techniques and course content, teaching techniques for specific courses, and advancing in academia. Though the book covers pertinent topics for a public relations educator, there is no mention of a crisis communications component in public relations programs.

While the Educators Academy provides an in-service benefit to university public relations educators, the pre-service benefit to public relations students is provided by the student affiliate organization of PRSA. This organization is the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). PRSA founded PRSSA to cultivate a relationship between students and professional public relations practitioners. With more than 8,000 members in 248 chapters on university campuses across the country, PRSSA's mission is

to serve members by enhancing their knowledge of public relations and providing access to professional development opportunities and to serve the public relations profession by helping to develop highly-qualified, well-prepared professionals (<http://www.prsa.org>).

The world's largest professional organization for public relations practitioners, PRSA offers many benefits to its members, including in-service seminars and research on crisis communications. Though PRSA's student affiliate, PRSSA, offers pre-service benefits to university public relations students, this student affiliate of PRSA does not focus on crisis communications. However, the organization does acknowledge the need for crisis communications services to university students. In fact, Christina Darnowski, Manager of Professional Resources and Christopher Tearnio, Assistant Education Program Director both said, "[Jami], you are on to something," regarding my study of universities with crisis communications components in their public relations programs.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter, which provided an overview of public relations history, focused on research regarding public relations and crisis communications and included the teaching of public relations, crisis management in the real world, and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). While depicting the public relations profession as being prevalent in the history of our country's government, business and societal arenas, the historical perspective provided background on the public relations profession. The section on the teaching of public relations focused on how public relations students at universities offering baccalaureate programs are being prepared for the public relations profession. While the section on crisis management in the real world provided examples of crisis

communications situations as well as recommended steps for public relations professionals to take in response to crises, the final section on PRSA provided an overview of the world's largest professional organization for public relations practitioners.

This literature review revealed that throughout history, organizations have experienced crises and have solicited public relations professionals to assist in communicating to their audiences during these negative times. In addition, this chapter highlighted the importance of public relations graduates being prepared to handle crisis situations once they enter their professions. Though PRSA has an established program to prepare public relations professionals for crisis situations once they are working in their professions, there is little literature on university public relations programs preparing undergraduate students for similar situations.

The next chapter discusses the method used in this study of how universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, are preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the study. There are five sections in the chapter: the research question, the methodology, the population and sample, the data collection, and the data analysis. This study focuses on how universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, are preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions.

This study is based on a pilot study conducted as part of a university qualitative research course during my doctoral program. With the perspective that preparedness is essential for handling a crisis, I questioned whether universities in my home state of Oklahoma offered a crisis communications component to their public relations students. This question led to the pilot, which was launched following a review of the public relations programs at Oklahoma's 21 public and private universities that offer baccalaureate degrees. The review revealed that only two of the schools offered a crisis communications component in their public relations program. In an age where organizational crises seem to be on the rise and with less than 10% of Oklahoma's universities providing public relations students with a crisis communications component, the supply and demand for crisis communications expertise did not seem to be in sync. Instead, there seemed to be a disconnect between the crisis communications component at universities that offer public relations programs and the expectations of organizations

that hire public relations graduates. Examples of organizational crises include an airline crash, a bank robbery, and a school shooting.

The pilot study provoked interest that there might be similar patterns throughout the United States. Though research hasn't been discovered regarding the inclusion of crisis management instruction at universities, further research of other states' university public relations curriculum could add knowledge gained through the pilot study. This study expands the research to one section of the country that incorporates the other three states in the West South Central region, which are Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas.

Research Question

This study attempts to answer the question, "How are universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions?" In the following methodology section, the work related to the pilot study and this study will be presented.

Methodology

The pilot study used a multiple case methodology, and this study utilizes the same methodology. A multiple case study was used to provide an answer for this study's research question because it gives insight into how several universities are preparing public relations graduates for crisis communications situations. It is important to understand the nature of the case study approach to research. According to Schwandt (2001), case study research is defined as a strategy for doing social inquiry. In case

study, the case is at center stage. A case study strategy is often preferred when the inquirer seeks answers to how or why questions, when the inquirer has little control over events being studied, when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence (Schwandt, 2001).

An objective of case study research is to generate knowledge of the particular. Schwandt (2001) explains that case study seeks to discern and pursue understanding of issues intrinsic to the case. He states, however, that cases can be chosen and studied because they are thought to be instrumentally useful in furthering the understanding of a particular problem, issue, and concept (Schwandt, 2001).

Merriam (1998) states the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, which is the case. He views the case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries so that the researcher can “fence in” what he plans to study. The bounded system, or case, may be chosen because it is derived from a concern, issue, or hypothesis. For instance, Merriam suggests a case could be a program; a specific policy; a person such as a student, a teacher, or a principal; or a group such as a class, a school, or a community.

According to Merriam (1998) multiple case studies involve collecting and analyzing data from several cases. A qualitative, inductive, multi-case study seeks to build abstractions across cases. The researcher attempts to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details. The researcher also attempts to see processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more

sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations. Merriam (1998) advises that the researcher must look carefully at the complex configuration of processes within each case, understand the local dynamics, before beginning to see patterns of variables that transcends particular cases.

Though the multiple case study for the pilot examined Oklahoma universities, this study used the same methodology to examine universities in the four states in the West South Central region of the United States. Where the case study examines the bounded system, content analysis was used to identify the bounded system.

Population and Sample

Content analysis was used in the pilot and this study to identify the population and sample. It is important to understand the nature of content analysis. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) content analysis is a method that permits researchers to study human behavior without being directly involved with people or situations through an analysis of their communications. The contents of any type of communication can be analyzed. Examples of this analysis, which usually is in the form of written communications, includes textbooks, essays, newspapers, novels, magazine articles, cookbooks, songs, political speeches, advertisements, and photographs. Non-written examples of content analysis include films, folk songs, and ancient pottery. A person or group's conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideas often are revealed in their communication (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

Five steps were taken to identify the population and sample for the pilot and this study. Whereas the first step in the pilot was to identify universities in Oklahoma that

offer baccalaureate degrees, the first step in this study was to identify the universities in the four West South Central states that offer baccalaureate degrees. These schools were located by going on-line to the World Wide Web page: <http://www.50states.com/college>. This web site provides the names of America's universities in each state.

Steps two through five were consistent in identifying the population and sample for the pilot and this study. The second step was to go directly to the web sites of each university that offered baccalaureate degrees to identify the schools that had public relations programs. The third step was to review the universities' public relations curriculum and determine which schools offered crisis communications components in their public relations programs. The fourth step was to print the public relations course descriptions for the schools that displayed their course descriptions on-line. The fifth step was to order course description catalogues for the schools that didn't display their public relations course descriptions on-line and for the schools that offered a crisis communications component.

Table 1 presents the content analysis for the four states in the West South Central region of the United States that offer a public relations program and a crisis communications component.

Table 1

America's West South Central States

Public Relations Programs and Crisis Communications Component

STATES	BACCALAUREATE UNIVERSITIES	PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM	CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS COMPONENT
Arkansas	14	11	0
Louisiana	16	13	2
Oklahoma	21	19	2
Texas	51	42	5
TOTAL	102	85	9

As illustrated in Table 1, of the 102 universities reviewed in this study, 85 offer public relations coursework, yet only nine offer a crisis communications component. Of this West South Central region, the breakdown in states that offer a crisis communications component follows: Arkansas had no schools, Louisiana had two schools, Oklahoma had two schools, and Texas had five schools.

Like the pilot, this study included two universities for each state. Since Texas had five universities that had a crisis communications component in their program, purposeful selection was used to identify two universities for the study. The criterion for purposeful selection in Texas was the two schools that offered the most crisis communications instruction. As indicated in Table 1, since Arkansas did not offer a crisis communications component to its public relations students, only three states, with two schools each, were included in this study. Therefore, the participants for this study included six schools. As with the pilot, in this study one professor from each school was asked to participate. The pilot included three graduates from each school. This study included two graduates from

each school. In total, there were six professors (one from each school) and 12 former students (two from each school).

As with the pilot, in this study, the professors who taught crisis communications at the selected universities were asked to participate. If a university had more than one professor teaching crisis communications, the professor who offered the most crisis communications instruction or had the greatest emphasis in public relations instruction, was the participant from that school.

Each professor was asked to recommend two former students from his/her crisis communications classes that graduated three-to-five years ago and were working in the public relations industry. The purpose for this graduation timeline was so these former students would be well into their profession and had time to apply their crisis communications instruction, but not too far into their careers so they could still recall their instruction.

The proposal for this study indicated if a professor declined to participate in the study and there were no other professors who taught crisis communications at that university, the public relations department chairman would be invited to participate instead. If he/she declined, the university would be removed from the study. If a former student declined to participate in the study, the professor would be asked to provide another name. All six professors and 12 former students agreed to participate in the study.

To offer anonymity in this study for the two schools from each of the three states that offer a crisis communications component in their public relations program, from here forward, the universities will be referred to as University Red, University White,

University Blue, University Green, University Yellow, and University Orange. The instructors will be called Professor Red, Professor White, Professor Blue, Professor Green, Professor Yellow, and Professor Orange. In addition, the college graduates will be referred to as Red Graduate I, II; White Graduate I, II; Blue Graduate I, II; Green Graduate I, II; Yellow Graduate I, II; and Orange Graduate I, II.

Data Collection

As previously indicated, this study was an expansion of the pilot. The study expanded Oklahoma to the other states in the West South Central region that offer crisis communications as part of their public relations program. Though the West South Central region includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, Arkansas was omitted from the study since the state did not offer a crisis communications component to its public relations students. In this study, as in the pilot, content analysis was used to identify the sample. However, purposeful selection was used to identify two of the five Texas schools for this study.

A multiple case study approach was used for this study. The primary data sources were interviews with the six professors and 12 former students. The professors were contacted, the purpose of the study was explained, and the professors were asked to participate. Once the professors agreed to participate in the study, a mutually agreed upon time and location was established, and the interviews were conducted in person. The professors were asked to sign an informed consent, which explained the study and authorized information to be released and included in this study in a confidential format. The professors were asked to authorize the conversations to be tape recorded so that the

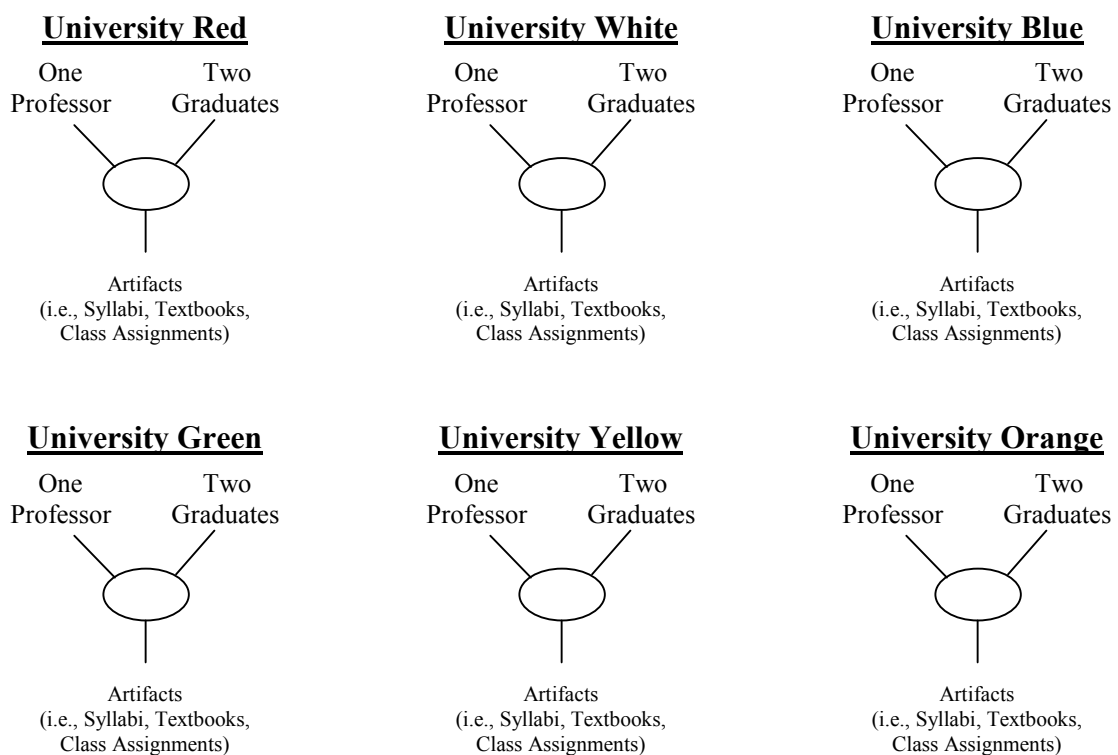
data could be accurately transcribed. The professors were asked the same 15 questions regarding the crisis communications component of their public relations programs, beginning with their professional background information (Appendix A). They were asked to provide crisis communications course descriptions, as well as syllabi, textbooks, and class assignments, which would confirm the primary data sources.

During the meetings with the professors, they were asked to provide two names of former students who had taken their crisis communications courses, graduated and were working in the public relations profession. These graduates were contacted, the study was explained, and they were asked if they were willing to be interviewed. Once the graduates agreed to participate in the study, a mutually agreed upon time and in most cases, location was established, and the interviews were conducted. The students were asked to sign an informed consent, which explained the study and authorized information to be released and included in this study in a confidential format. The 12 graduates gave permission for the conversations to be tape recorded so that the data could be accurately transcribed. The graduates were asked the same 15 questions regarding their responses to the crisis communications component of their public relations programs (Appendix B). In-person interviews were conducted with three of the graduates. Nine interviews were conducted over the telephone. Though some of the interviews were conducted in-person and some over the telephone, all of the interviews were tape-recorded. Once the interviews were concluded, the tapes were transcribed by the researcher. Other data sources gathered included field notes and artifacts. The primary data sources for this study were interviews with the professors and students. The supporting data sources were artifacts, which include crisis communications course descriptions, syllabi,

textbooks, class assignments, and field notes. As illustrated in Figure 1, this triangulation of one professor, two students, and several artifacts were considered a separate data set for each of the six universities. This triangulation provided the data for this study.

Figure 1

Themes—Triangulation



Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998) data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. Merriam said:

Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of

making meaning. Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. (p. 178)

Merriam (1998) stated that a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit, and that conveying an understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analyzing data. He said, “In case studies, communicating understanding—the goal of the data analysis—is linked to the fact that data have usually been derived from interviews, field observations, and documents” (p. 193).

As with the pilot study, this study’s primary data sources were interviews with professors and graduates. Specifically, this study included six professors and 12 graduates from universities in the West South Central region of the United States that offer a crisis communications component to their public relations students.

Common themes and patterns regarding the professors’ crisis communications components were reviewed and coded. The coding consisted of designating the information collected into various categories that developed during the interviews. Recurring words and phrases were identified and categorized so that they could be easily retrieved for the analysis and write-up of the findings. Through coding, common themes and patterns regarding the graduates’ responses to the professors’ instruction were reviewed.

A follow-up with field notes and a review of the artifacts offered support to the interviews. Field notes consisted of on-site observations of the professors and graduates, the words they consistently used and their office environments. Verbal descriptions of the setting, the people, and the activities as well as direct quotations and summaries of

what the participants said were included in the field notes. Provided by the professors, the artifacts included the syllabi, textbooks, and class assignments. These artifacts provided insight because these tangible instructional tools allowed an opportunity for contrast and comparison of the professors' crisis communications components.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the data for the individual cases, the six universities, were individually coded and separated into primary and secondary themes. Then, as depicted in Figure 3, the data for all six universities was analyzed and reported as primary and secondary themes. The common themes, revealed in Figure 3, were used to answer the research question for this study.

Figure 2

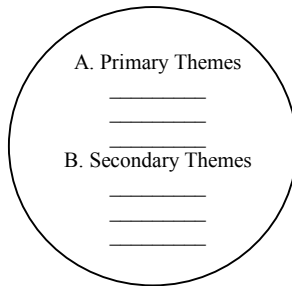
Themes – Individual Sets

<u>University Red</u> A. Primary Themes _____ _____ _____ B. Secondary Themes _____ _____ _____	<u>University White</u> A. Primary Themes _____ _____ _____ B. Secondary Themes _____ _____ _____	<u>University Blue</u> A. Primary Themes _____ _____ _____ B. Secondary Themes _____ _____ _____
<u>University Green</u> A. Primary Themes _____ _____ _____ B. Secondary Themes _____ _____ _____	<u>University Yellow</u> A. Primary Themes _____ _____ _____ B. Secondary Themes _____ _____ _____	<u>University Orange</u> A. Primary Themes _____ _____ _____ B. Secondary Themes _____ _____ _____

Figure 3

Themes – Combined Sets

All Six Universities



The next chapter focuses on the findings of this study of how universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, are preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions.

CHAPTER IV

Findings of the Study

Introduction

This study examines the question, “How are universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions?” This chapter focuses on the results of this study. There are three sections in the chapter: 1) summary of the study, 2) descriptive information and common themes for each of the six cases, and 3) common themes between and among the six cases. The three data sources for this study include the interviews with six college professors who incorporate crisis communications in their classes, the two graduates from each of the six universities, and the artifacts such as course descriptions, course syllabi, class assignments, and textbooks from each university.

Summary of the Study

This multiple case study examines the research question. A multiple case study was used because it provided insight into how several universities were preparing baccalaureate public relations graduates for crisis communications situations. The West South Central region, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, was included in this study. During the content analysis phase of this study, the findings showed that no universities in Arkansas offered a crisis communications component to their public relations students; so Arkansas was omitted from the study.

After identifying two universities from Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, that offered a crisis communications component in their public relations programs, the study focused on one professor and two graduates from each institution. These six professors and 12 graduates were the primary data sources for this study. The professors were selected because they taught crisis communications at their universities. These professors provided names of former students from their crisis communications classes that graduated three-to-five years ago and were working in the public relations industry. The purpose for this graduation timeline was so these former students would be well into their profession and had time to apply their crisis communications instruction, but not too far into their careers so they could still recall their instruction.

The interviews with the professors were conducted in person and the interviews with the graduates were conducted over the telephone. All of the interviews were tape-recorded and the tapes were transcribed. With the primary two data sources being the interviews with the professors and graduates, the supporting data sources were artifacts, which include crisis communications course descriptions, syllabi, textbooks, class assignments, and field notes. As illustrated in Figure 1, this triangulation of the data from one professor, two graduates, and several artifacts were considered a separate data set for each of the six universities. This triangulation of information from these three sources provided the data for this study.

To offer anonymity in this study for the two schools from each of the three states that offer a crisis communications component in their public relations programs, the universities are referred to as University Red, University White, University Blue, University Green, University Yellow, and University Orange. The instructors are called

Professor Red, Professor White, Professor Blue, Professor Green, Professor Yellow, and Professor Orange. In addition, the college graduates are referred to as Red Graduate I, II; White Graduate I, II; Blue Graduate I, II; Green Graduate I, II; Yellow Graduate I, II; and Orange Graduate I, II.

Descriptive Information and Common Themes for Each of the Six Cases

This section includes descriptive information and common themes for each of the six cases. The descriptive information provides the reader with insights regarding the university, the professor, and the two graduates for each site. The common themes for each case are based on the interview of the professor, the interviews of the two students, and the artifacts for each university.

University Red

University Red is a private religious university located in a large city. The university has an enrollment of 3,800 students, 51 percent of who are undergraduate and 49 percent of who are graduate. Ninety-eight percent of the faculty members hold doctorate degrees. The student-faculty ratio is 12-to-1. The university offers degrees from eight colleges. University Red's public relations program is located in the Mass Communications Department, which is in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Red

As a Professor of Mass Communications, Professor Red has taught at University Red for 30 years. She is the sponsor of the university's student organization, Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). She is also the sponsor of an extra-curricular organization for public relations students who work together and assist community non-profit organizations with their communications needs. Professor Red teaches all three courses that involve crisis communications. The interview with Professor Red began with a casual conversation about Asia because she was preparing to travel there in the near future to teach a public relations course. Though she was extremely busy completing the spring semester and preparing for her trip, she spent more than an hour answering questions and did not hurry through the interview. She was warm, candid, and insightful.

Professor Red provided the names of three graduates, who were all interviewed for the pilot study. Two of these interviews were used for this study. These two graduates were selected because they were available to answer follow-up questions and the third graduate was not available. Both of these Red Graduates worked for public relations firms.

Red Graduate I

Red Graduate I holds the position of Junior Account Representative for a public relations firm in a large city. She supports a government agency and provides relationship education workshops for the state to enhance relationships in families. Though Red Graduate I was working in an entry-level position, she was able to provide

insight into crisis communications because she had already witnessed controversy with the media criticizing her organization for blending religion with government. She graduated from University Red in 2002 with a major in Mass Communications and a focus on Public Relations. The interview with Red Graduate I was upbeat and positive. Since it was one of the three graduate interviews that took place in person, there was an opportunity to have a relaxed and lengthy conversation.

Red Graduate II

Red Graduate II works as an Account Executive for a public relations firm. She manages employees in two large cities in two states and is increasing her responsibilities at the firm. She graduated from University Red in 2000 with a major in Mass Communications and a focus on public relations. The interview with Red Graduate II was held in person and though she worked for a different public relations firm, the interview took place in the same office building as Red Graduate I. Even though one of her client's restaurant's had just experienced a robbery at gunpoint that week and she was busy preparing for a business trip to the second city, Red Graduate II was composed and informative during the interview. In fact, she said that due to the recent robbery and her dealings with the media, crisis communications was very much on her mind.

Common Themes for University Red

The data from the six individual cases, which includes professor and graduate interviews as well as artifacts such as course syllabi, textbooks, and class assignments, were collected and analyzed for common themes. As illustrated in Figure 2, the data for

each of the six universities was individually coded and broken down into primary and secondary themes. Representing one of the six individual cases, University Red's crisis communications component was reviewed and common themes surfaced from interviews with the professor and two graduates as well as course artifacts. In fact, five themes emerged between Professor Red and the two Red Graduates. The common themes included positioning instruction as a real life experience, using case studies as instructional tools, teamwork as an instructional tool, developing a crisis communications plan, and managing the media.

For instance, Professor Red, who defines a crisis as anything that threatens an organization's reputation or public trust, emphasized the importance of having a public relations plan and being proactive with the media. "I tell my students that when they begin a new job, one of the first things they should do is develop a plan of action in case a crisis situation arises," said Professor Red. "The plan may not fit the actual crisis when one occurs but it can quickly be adjusted to do so." She continued, "The media needs to know that the public relations person is in charge and on top of the situation." Red Graduate I supported the importance of having a plan as well as working with the media. "The most valuable lesson I learned in college was to constantly communicate with the media because they are the gatekeepers and if you work with them they will do their best to give you objective coverage of the story," said Red Graduate I. "However, if you're against them, they will pick up on it right away and automatically work against you." Red Graduate II said, "Knowing how to handle the media is key to successful crisis communications management."

University Red participants agreed that outside class assignments such as learning to work in teams while in their university public relations program helped them in their careers. “I learned to work as a team, which has helped me with my job because almost everything I do involves teamwork and group think,” said Red Graduate I. “You see a lot of situations botched up because the corporations don’t have a crisis communications plan in place and/or there isn’t a person on board who has had crisis communications instruction or experience,” said Red Graduate II. “They don’t have a crisis communications team in place.”

Regarding teaching crisis communications, Professor Red mentioned the Tylenol case and the importance of positioning the instruction as a real life situation. These two themes, case studies and real life instruction, were mentioned together by all three University Red participants. “I teach crisis communications with real life case studies such as the Tylenol case,” said Professor Red. “Case studies are effective and so is role playing and group discussions because students take on roles to pitch their hypothetical clients, then they break into groups to discuss the cases and how they were portrayed.” Red Graduate I mentioned case study instruction as well. “The crisis communications courses had the greatest impact on me in college because we studied real life situations such as the Tylenol case,” said Red Graduate I. “We partnered up and acted like we were responding to the media just like the Tylenol public relations people did 20 years ago, then we discussed and evaluated our performances with the hypothetical media in class.” Red Graduate II said, “A badly handled response to the media’s inquiry of a crisis can negatively affect the bottom line. We talked about the timeless Tylenol crisis and how they handled the public relations situation correctly.”

University White

University White is a private religious university located in a large city. The university has an enrollment of 4,200 students, 67 percent of who are undergraduate and 33 percent of who are graduate. Eighty-nine percent of the faculty members hold doctorate degrees. The student-faculty ratio is 11-to-1. The university offers degrees from four colleges. University White's public relations program is located in the Mass Communications Department, which is in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Professor White

An Associate Professor of Communications, Professor White has taught at University White for 19 years. He previously chaired the department. University White offers a crisis communications component through three of its courses. Though Professor White developed all three of these courses in the curriculum, he is currently only teaching the primary crisis communications course. The interview with Professor White was powerful because he is experienced in the art of persuasion and conflict management. He provided examples of crises on all levels including the political, non-profit, and corporate arenas. Professor White provided the names of three graduates, who were all interviewed for the pilot study. Two of these interviews were used for this study. These two graduates were selected because they were available to answer follow-up questions and the third graduate was not available. Interestingly, both White Graduates are employed by computer companies.

White Graduate I

White Graduate I works as a Public Relations Manager for a computer company in a large city. The company measures computer software and hardware and tests clients' computer products before they are released for sale to the public. The company's clients are primarily located in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. White Graduate I has been promoted very quickly in the company and manages 18 employees who are responsible for communications in the European region. She graduated from University White in 2000 with a major in Organizational Communications and a minor in Spanish. The interview with White Graduate I was conducted over the telephone while she was driving a car to the airport to board an airplane for Europe. It was impressive how prepared she was for the interview and how energized she was about the public relations profession.

White Graduate II

White Graduate II is employed by a software company as well. He is a Communications Coordinator in a large city and works with the sales and marketing teams to promote the company's product. White Graduate II graduated from University White in 2000 with a major in Organizational Communications and a minor in Business Management. The interview took place in person over a cup of coffee at Barnes and Noble Bookstore on a snowy Friday evening. Though we were both concerned about the driving conditions caused by the weather, we had a relaxed and insightful conversation.

Common Themes for University White

University White's crisis communications component was reviewed and five common themes arose from interviews with Professor White and the White Graduates. During their interviews, Professor White and both White Graduates mentioned three of the themes, which include crisis communications instruction, degree minors, and managing the media. The other two themes, which include college internships and role playing, were mentioned by the professor and only one of the graduates. Professor White, who believes that crises are inevitable but that conflict can become opportunities if handled correctly, quoted John Dewey who said, "conflict is the gadfly of life." Professor White and the two White Graduates mentioned that a crisis communications component is important to the university public relations curriculum. "You cannot survive in this world without good communications skills," said Professor White. "I don't understand a university that doesn't offer crisis management as a required course in the mass communications curriculum." White Graduate I said, "My crisis communications instruction made me more analytical and better able to communicate in my career." White Graduate II agreed. "My crisis communications instruction helped me to objectively list the wants and needs of both parties in conflict and find a commonality," said White Graduate II. "It's only when you get out and work that you realize how important your instruction was at the time."

Professor White also emphasized the importance of public relations students having a minor during college. "I declared my major in Organizational Communications in my freshman year," said White Graduate I. "I realized it would be asset to have an understanding of another language so I declared my minor in Spanish during my junior

year.” White Graduate II said, “My minor in Business Management has helped me better understand the financial end of my company and I feel more prepared to communicate to our internal and external audiences when a crisis occurs.”

Managing the media during a crisis was also an important topic to Professor White, who believes that when responding to the media, public relations professionals must be honest. “You have to stay in control of the media, who have the questions but you have the answers, which is knowledge,” said Professor White. “I teach my students to tell reporters to not ask for a conclusion that they can’t draw.” White Graduate I added, “You need to be open and up front when talking to the media.” White Graduate II said, “The media is always going to be on hand after a disaster and they are typically looking for blood.”

Professor White stressed the value of students having an internship during college so that they are better equipped for the real world. “Students need to experience an actual crisis so that they can feel the heat and uncertainty that comes with conflict management,” said Professor White. “We have an active internship program that fulfills this need.” White Graduate I had an internship with a domestic violence intervention service and then with a personnel company, which led to a full-time job after graduation. “As an intern, I wrote a lot of press releases and newsletter articles, which was a great experience,” said White Graduate I. “I think internships should be required in college because they help students get jobs.”

In-class assignments also surfaced with the University White participants. In-class assignments such as role playing and case studies are key aspects of a crisis communications component according to Professor White and both White Graduates. “I

use role playing to make case studies more realistic to students,” said Professor White. “I remember role playing and case studies in college,” said White Graduate I. “My professor had some interesting real life stories that stood out, like the Tylenol case study.” White Graduate II remembers small group discussions when studying cases. “The professor gave a lot of real life examples about businesses in conflict,” said White Graduate II. “He especially gave examples of crises in the Asian culture, which I use a lot today because my company has Asian customers in the manufacturing business.”

University Blue

University Blue is a private religious university located in a large city. The university has an enrollment of 5,500 students, 64 percent of who are undergraduate and 36 percent of who are graduate. Eighty-nine percent of the faculty members hold doctorate degrees. The student-faculty ratio is 12-to-1. The university offers degrees from five colleges. University Blue’s public relations program is located in the Communications Department, which is in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Blue

An Associate Professor of Communications and the head of the Public Relations Sequence, Professor Blue is also the faculty advisor for University Blue’s Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter. She has taught at University Blue since 1990. She taught at another university prior to that. Professor Blue has taught all three of the public relations courses that focus on crisis communications, however, she is currently teaching the primary crisis communications course. Initially, the interview

with Professor Blue was scheduled for only 45 minutes due to her busy schedule.

However, she was warm, welcoming, and willing to provide valuable input for the study and wound up spending more than an hour in the interview. Professor Blue provided the names of two graduates. One worked for a local public relations firm and the other worked for an international corporation.

Blue Graduate I

Blue Graduate I is the Communications Manager for an international paper mill in a mid-size town. She handles all internal and external communications for the mill, which has 800 employees. In her position for the company, she focuses on internal communications as well as community contributions and donations. She also manages media relations and crisis communications. She graduated from University Blue in 2000, where she majored in Mass Communications with an emphasis in public relations. The interview with Blue Graduate was conducted over the telephone and was very uplifting because she is so inspired by the public relations profession as well as her career in the paper mill industry.

Blue Graduate II

Blue Graduate II works in a large city and is a Public Relations Account Executive for a local public relations firm. The firm focuses on public relations, marketing, advertising, and media buying. With 30 employees, it is the second largest public relations firm in the city. The agency focuses on social marketing, which includes social awareness campaigns like tobacco-free living and the “Keep [the state] Beautiful”

campaign, which was developed to keep people from littering. Blue Graduate II graduated from University Blue in 2001 with a double major in Mass Communications and American Studies and a minor in History. Conducted over the telephone, the interview was very beneficial because although she had only been working in her profession for four years, she had already been able to apply what she learned at her university regarding crisis communications.

Common Themes for University Blue

University Blue's crisis communications component was reviewed and five common themes surfaced from interviews with Professor Blue and both Blue Graduates. These themes included managing the media, college internships, case study instruction, teamwork as an instructional tool, and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession. Professor Blue, who said that crises are what mold the perception of public relations, stressed the importance of being able to handle a crisis. "Being able to work with the media is essential to a public relations professional's success," said Professor Blue. "Any classroom experience that will help students to understand how to deal with a crisis and the media is important." Blue Graduate I supported the importance of working with the media. "I remember from my college instruction that you always want to be open and cooperative with the media and authorities," said Blue Graduate I. "You always want to go to the media with an initial statement saying that you're still investigating the situation." Blue Graduate II confirms her remembrance of media training. "The most valuable lesson I learned in college was to tell the media the truth," said Blue Graduate II.

Internships at University Blue also were mentioned during the interviews with Professor Blue and both Blue Graduates. “My alma mater is big on internships and networking with local professionals, which is a great experience because they provide real life situations,” said Blue Graduate I. “I had an internship with a children’s museum and with two public relations firms and they taught me so much about the profession.” Blue Graduate II actually had an opportunity to implement a program during her internship. “I had two internships, one of which was with a center for environmental communications, where I developed an environmental journalism workshop for high school students to teach them how to cover environmental issues.”

Instructional tools also surfaced with the University Blue participants. In mentioning her methods for teaching crisis communications, Professor Blue highlighted role playing, lecture, outside speakers, group discussions, and case studies as being most effective with students. “I liked reviewing case studies because the professor showed us video tapes of real life press conferences with the CEOs of the Exxon Valdez and Valu Jet and it showed us what not to do when talking to the media,” said Blue Graduate I. “When I got my job after college, one of my first assignments was to write a crisis plan and I referred back to my class materials and textbooks to develop the plan.” Blue Graduate II also remembers her class instruction. “Of the things I remember in college, I recall the case studies the most because they were valuable to refer to when I began working,” said Blue Graduate II. “I remember how everyone in class would present case studies and we would all learn from each other, which is an effective way to teach to teach crisis communications.” Blue Graduate II’s recollection of her classroom instruction was supported by the course syllabus, which stressed the importance of

developing a crisis communications plan as well as the significance of reviewing case studies.

In reference to group work as an instruction tool, Professor Blue and both Blue Graduates mentioned the effectiveness of working in teams. “Sometimes I divide the class into groups and give them a class period or two and have them work in groups as a team on a crisis situation,” said Professor Blue. “Students need to learn to work in teams because when they graduate and start working in their professions and a real crisis happens, they’ll be forced to work in teams to get through the crisis.” Blue Graduate I said, “My university’s public relations program emphasized group work such as the student organization that helped non-profit groups as well as PRSSA’s Bateman Team, which was a group competition in dealing with a crisis situation.” Also mentioning the value of teamwork, Blue Graduate II said, “I loved working on the Bateman Team because I learned something very useful for my career, I received college credit hours for it, and when we won a national award for our crisis campaign, it looked good on my resume.”

Ethics was also highlighted with Professor Blue and both Blue Graduates. Blue Graduate I said, “The Bateman challenge this year was to develop a campaign around ethics, specifically promoting ethics on college campuses, and my alma mater placed in the top three of this nationwide competition.” Stating that she thought ethics was a topic discussed in all of her public relations courses because it was a religious university, Blue Graduate II said, “Every student at the university was required to take an ethics course called ‘Making Moral Decisions,’ which I thought was an interesting name. To make it all of this way to college, students surely have an idea of how to make a moral decision

or they wouldn't have been able to come this far in life." She went on to say, "Public relations and ethics work in conjunction." Professor Blue explains that the overall mission of University Blue's public relations program incorporates ethics. "Sometimes when students role play an unethical solution in response to a crisis situation, I tell them that while their solution deals with the crisis at hand, they're going to have another crisis because their solution is unethical."

University Green

University Green is a state university located in a mid-size town. The university has an enrollment of 31,000 students, 84 percent of who are undergraduate and 16 percent of who are graduate. Eighty-nine percent of the faculty members hold doctorate degrees. The student-faculty ratio is 21-to-1. The university offers degrees from 18 colleges. University Green's public relations program is located in the Media and Public Affairs Department, which is in the Mass Communications College.

Professor Green

As a Professor of Mass Communications and Public Affairs at University Green, Professor Green has been an educator since 1976, but has only been a professor at University Green since 1994. He teaches two of the three public relations courses related to crisis communications. He is a leader in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC), which is an international organization for Journalism and Mass Communications professors. In addition, he is published in one of the books cited in this study. The interview with Professor Green lasted more than two

hours, which is the longest interview with a professor in this study. Professor Green was relaxed and very willing to provide information. His wealth of knowledge added depth to the research. Professor Green provided the names of two graduates for the study. However, these graduates did not meet the graduation timeline criterion, so Professor Green was asked to provide two additional names. These next two graduates were interviewed for this study.

Green Graduate I

Green Graduate I works in a large city as a Sponsorship Coordinator for the state's lottery. She has been employed by this organization for two years. In her position for the lottery, she manages event planning, promotions, and community relations. She also handles internal events such as seminars. Green Graduate I majored in Public Relations and graduated from University Green in 2001. The interview with Green Graduate I was the shortest of all of the graduate interviews. However, it was one of the most informative. Her thoughts were purposeful and concise.

Green Graduate II

Green Graduate II works in a large city, as an Assistant Director of Media Relations in the Office of University Relations at a university. She has held this position since 2001. Her duties include writing press releases, pitching stories to the media, and handling crisis communications. Green Graduate II graduated from University Green in 2000 with a major in Public Relations. Though the interview with Green Graduate II was the last of 18 interviews for this study, the conversation was refreshing and inspiring

because she was articulate and poised and had much information to offer regarding crisis communications.

Common Themes for University Green

During a review of the interviews with Professor Green and both Green Graduates, four common themes surfaced. These themes included developing a crisis communications plan, case study instruction, college internships, and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession. Professor Green, who believes that crises are not only challenges but are actually opportunities, emphasizes strategic thinking and public relations planning when teaching his crisis communications courses. “Basic public relations principles such as being a strategic thinker, benefits public relations graduates in all aspects of their profession, especially when handling a crisis situation,” said Professor Green. Green Graduate I agreed with the importance of planning for a crisis. “In college, I learned to apply the thought-process of strategic planning, from being proactive when planning events, to being reactive when working with the media,” said Green Graduate I. “One of the most beneficial things I learned in college was how to put together a public relations plan for a real client with an image problem,” said Green Graduate II. “The professor divided our class into two groups and each group actually developed a crisis plan and presented it to the client.” Green Graduate II said that this real life experience helped her understand how to work as a team, how to brainstorm creative ideas, and how to be professionally competitive.

Professor Green and both Green Graduates also spoke of case studies as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. “Case studies encourage students

to work in groups,” said Professor Green. “We look at a case study in class, then I usually divide the students into groups so that they can discuss how they would vary the public relations input to improve the outcome of the case.” Green Graduate I specifically remembers two case studies. “We actually went through the process that Tylenol experienced with their scare,” said Green Graduate I. “We also discussed the Pepsi scare when they found needles in their soft drink.” Green Graduate II recalls her case study instruction as well. “In the Tylenol case, the company could have been destroyed but instead, they became forerunners of their industry with their safety seals,” said Green Graduate II. “They took a tremendously negative situation and turned lemons into lemonade.”

Another common theme with Professor Green and both Green Graduates was that they all supported internships during college. “Our university doesn’t require internships but our students who have had internships believe they’re valuable and those who didn’t have them, wish they had,” said Professor Green. “However, we encourage students to pick a minor that would benefit them such as the arts, science, business, or education, so if a student minors in science, he or she would be better qualified for a public relations job at a hospital.” Green Graduate I, who has an interest in political science, had an internship with a United States Senator while she was in college. “My internship with the senator was a great real-life opportunity in dealing with crisis communications situations,” said Green Graduate I. “It seemed like everyone who called the Senator’s office had a crisis and we had to deal with it.” Green Graduate II had two internships in college. “I had an internship in my school’s University Relations Department, which

lead to this job,” said Green Graduate II. “It was wonderful because it gave me hands-on experience such as writing press releases.”

Curriculum also surfaced with the University Green participants. Professor Green, who stressed University Green’s public relations program incorporates ethics discussions in all of its classes, said they recently redesigned their curriculum to specifically build in ethics instruction. “I believe some standards are cross-cultural such as human rights,” said Professor Green. “For instance, I think cannibalism is ethically wrong and I’m not going to endorse it just because it’s an accepted practice in some cultures.” Green Graduate I said, “I deal with ethical situations every day in my public relations job with the lottery, such as making sure that children are not involved.” Green Graduate II, who said the first rule in public relations is to do no harm to your client and there is more opportunity for harm in a crisis situation, believes ethics is essential to being successful in the public relations profession. “I’m encouraged that the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) holds its members to high ethical standards.”

University Yellow

University Yellow is a state university located in a mid-size town. The university has an enrollment of 50,000 students, 78 percent of who are undergraduate and 22 percent of who are graduate. The student-faculty ratio is 17-to-1. The university offers degrees from 16 colleges. University Yellow’s public relations program is located in the Public Relations Department, which is in the College of Communication.

Professor Yellow

As a Senior Lecturer in the College of Communication, Professor Yellow has taught at University Yellow for ten years. Professor Yellow said that according to *U.S. News and World Report*, University Yellow has one of the top ten public relations programs in the country. Professor Yellow teaches one of the two crisis communications courses at University Yellow and he works full time in the public relations profession. The interview with Professor Yellow was very enlightening primarily because he has had so much practical experience. He offered much input for the study. Professor Yellow provided two names of graduates for this study, both of who were interviewed.

Yellow Graduate I

Yellow Graduate I works in a large city as a Communications Supervisor for the largest funeral home cemetery corporation in the nation. She oversees two national community outreach programs. She said that since it is such a large company, they have the resources to offer strong community programs. The company has eight national community outreach programs, one of which is a replica of the Vietnam Wall and it travels across the country to about 20 cities a year. Yellow Graduate I graduated from University Yellow in 2002 with a major in Public Relations. The interview with Yellow Graduate I was interesting because she provided a perspective on an unusual public relations job.

Yellow Graduate II

Yellow Graduate II works in the same large city as Yellow Graduate I as a Senior Account Supervisor for a public relations firm. He manages nine accounts ranging from Fortune 1000 to smaller start-up companies. He oversees budgets and supervises employees in client services. Yellow Graduate II graduated from University Yellow in 2000 with a major in Public Relations and a minor in Business. The interview with Yellow Graduate II added value to this study because he provided a business angle to the public relations profession. He was not hesitant to say the bottom line is most important in the business world, so it is important to public relations professionals as well.

Common Themes for University Yellow

Five common themes surfaced as a result of the interviews with Professor Yellow and both Yellow Graduates. These themes included developing a crisis communications plan, case study instruction, college internships, the benefits of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession. Professor Yellow, who teaches students to be proactive and develop a crisis plan when they enter their professions, stresses to students the importance of knowing how to minimize the negative impact of a crisis as well as gaining control of the situation from a communications standpoint. “I think almost everything you do in public relations is a crisis, so crisis management prepares students to handle the real world and helps them with their own time management, which I think many students are lacking,” said Professor Yellow.

In positioning his instruction as real life, he uses case studies to do so. “I start every class with a mini-crisis,” said Professor Yellow. “I give students 4” x 6” cards and they have to write down their answers regarding what they would do about the crisis.” Referring to case study instruction, Yellow Graduate II said, “We reviewed case studies like September 11 and the Tylenol case and looked at scenarios that really took place on a day-to-day basis and that was very helpful.”

Internships and student groups also surfaced with the University Yellow participants. Emphasizing university internships, Professor Yellow said, “Our internship program is very strong and students are required to have at least one internship, which makes them more marketable when they graduate.” Yellow Graduate II had several internships in college. “I had internships with the March of Dimes, a construction firm, a computer company, and an advertising and marketing firm,” said Yellow Graduate II. “It’s important for public relations students to have internships because you need to show that you’ve had some practical experience when you graduate.” Another student group that Professor Yellow and both Yellow Graduates agreed was beneficial was the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). “I thought PRSSA was very beneficial during college,” said Yellow Graduate I.

Emphasizing that crisis management is about discipline and stressing that he teaches discipline in his classes, Professor Yellow said, “I have rules in my class because there are rules in life and students need to get used to following the rules.” Professor Yellow believes that if a professor is teaching public relations properly, crisis communications should be a component in every public relations course. “My crisis communications class was very team oriented so we worked in teams and that’s how you

work in the real world,” said Yellow Graduate II. “You have to learn how to structure things and how to give orders and how to take orders.”

Regarding ethics, Professor Yellow stresses that ethics, like crisis communications, should be incorporated into every public relations course. “If you’re not ethical, you shouldn’t be in the public relations profession,” said Professor Yellow. “I have never in my 40 years of public relations experience, lied to the media.” Yellow Graduate I remembers her ethics instruction at University Yellow. “We discussed that when we were looking for a job, to make sure the company was ethical and to not get into a situation we would regret,” said Yellow Graduate I. “And, if we found ourselves in a situation where we were uncomfortable, we should not be afraid to tell the proper authorities.”

University Orange

University Orange is a private religious university located in a large city. The university has an enrollment of 10,000 students, 62 percent of who are undergraduate and 38 percent of who are graduate. Eighty-four percent of the faculty members hold doctorate degrees. The student-faculty ratio is 11-to-1. The university offers degrees from seven colleges. University Orange’s public relations program is located in the Corporate Communications and Public Affairs Department, which is in the College of Arts.

Professor Orange

An assistant professor of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, Professor Orange has taught at University Orange since 2001. Before he held this position, he taught public relations at two other universities. Prior to teaching, he gained extensive corporate communications experience in the airline industry. Though there are several public relations courses that cover crisis communications at University Orange, there are three key public relations courses that specifically cover the topic and Professor Orange teaches the primary course. However, he occasionally teaches all three of the courses. As with all of the interviews with the professors, the meeting with Professor Orange was conducted in person. In fact, after the interview was scheduled, Professor Orange was notified that he would be moving his office the day of the interview. Though it would have been understandable had he rescheduled the interview, it was impressive that he did not do so. Even while in the process of moving his office, his demeanor was inviting, composed, and informative.

Professor Orange was asked to provide the names of two graduates for this study. He responded to this request by asking four graduates to contact me so that I could decide which ones to participate. The two who were chosen for the study were selected because they contacted me first. However, all four graduates were qualified to participate in the study. Interestingly, the two Orange Graduates in this study worked for the same national public relations firm, which is the second largest public relations firm in the United States (Seitel, 1998). Though employed by the same firm, the two Orange Graduates work in different cities.

Orange Graduate I

Orange Graduate I works in a large city. The firm's practice in this city includes corporate affairs, corporate communications, technology, and consumer lifestyles.

Orange Graduate I works with a team of five fellow employees who focus on consumer lifestyle clients, who are primarily in the travel and tourism industry. Her largest client is a major hotel, which is a convention hotel in this city. The hotel chain also has eight resorts in the Caribbean and Orange Graduate I frequently works with the media on-site to promote her client. She interned at the public relations firm where she is now employed during her junior and senior years in college and that internship enabled her to attain a full-time job at the firm. Orange Graduate I graduated from University Orange in 2003 and was a Corporate Communications and Public Affairs major. Her minor was Spanish, which she says has been beneficial because she frequently communicates with Spanish-speaking media and employees at her client's resorts. The interview with Orange Graduate I was refreshing and upbeat because she was so enthusiastic about her career, her crisis communications instruction, and the public relations industry in general. Even though I realized at the beginning of the interview that she had only been working for two years, which did not meet the graduation timeline, I continued with the interview anyway. She provided valuable information for this study.

Orange Graduate II

Orange Graduate II works in a major eastern city and is employed by the same public relations firm as Orange Graduate I, however she focuses on pharmaceutical clients. She represents her clients by working closely with the media, specifically being

proactive with them by coordinating media tours and pitching positive stories about her pharmaceutical clients to reporters. Orange Graduate II said she has dealt with a lot of negative press this past year regarding the repercussions of Vioxx. Though Vioxx was not her client, she said the deadly side effects of taking the medication affected the entire pharmaceutical industry. Orange Graduate II has worked for the public relations firm for one year and prior to that, she worked for the largest public relations firm in the world (Seitel, 1998) for two years. She graduated from University Orange in 2002 and majored in Corporate Communications and Public Affairs with a minor in Spanish. Orange Graduate II said she doesn't speak Spanish very often in her current position. The interview with Orange Graduate II was held on a Friday evening. After a stressful week at a demanding public relations firm in a major city, it was impressive that she not only consented to be interviewed but also was actually enthused about it.

Common Themes for University Orange

University Orange's crisis communications component was reviewed and four common themes surfaced from interviews with Professor Orange and the two Orange Graduates. These themes included college internships, case study instruction, teamwork as an instructional tool, and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession. For instance, Professor Orange emphasized internships in the University Orange public relations curriculum and both Orange Graduates mentioned the importance of their internships and how their internships helped them get their first jobs. "Some of the things that were really good and encouraged in college had real life applications like

internships,” said Orange Graduate II. “I did an internship with [a major hockey team’s] public relations department and received college credit as well as hands-on experience.”

In reference to teaching crisis communications, Professor Orange mentioned the importance of teamwork and group projects and both Orange Graduates mirrored his belief. Professor Orange discussed the value of discussing case studies in class, specifically mentioning the Tylenol case study as a positive crisis communications case and the Exxon Valdez as a negative one. Interestingly, both Orange Graduates stressed the importance of case studies in learning how to handle a crisis and highlighted the Tylenol and Exxon Valdez cases. “With all the courses throughout the University’s Public Relations Department, we were always taught with case studies, but we had a real life assignment as well and we had to develop our own campaign based on a real life crisis,” said Orange Graduate I. “It’s one thing to teach something in theory, it’s another to have a real life client you can actually help and get a grade for it.” Orange Graduate II mentioned case study instruction when she said, “Everyone remembers the Exxon Valdez case study, which is the principle of what went wrong and the Tylenol case study was what went right.”

Concluding the interviews with the University Orange participants, the issue of ethics struck a cord with Professor Orange and both Orange Graduates. All three participants said that ethics was taught throughout the entire public relations curriculum at University Orange. Professor Orange said that he tells his students that all they really have in life is their credibility and once they lose that, “they’re cooked.” Both Orange Graduates said that during their public relations instruction at University Orange, they learned if a company is not ethical, they will lose credibility and will probably never get

it back. “I’ve had ethical situations come up with press trips because it can’t appear that I take the media on resort trips and in return, expect them to print positive articles about my client in their publications,” said Orange Graduate I.

Common Themes Between and Among the Cases

The previous section focused on the six individual cases included in this study. This section will focus on the multiple case study component of this study and will focus on the common themes between and among the six cases. With common themes emerging for each of the six universities in this study, it is also interesting to review the common themes that surfaced among and between all of these universities. As depicted in Figure 3, Chapter III, the data for all six universities will be analyzed and reported as primary and secondary themes. In total, nine themes emerged from this study. Of these nine themes, four were primary, four were secondary, and one was notable. None of the themes that emerged in this study were mentioned by all 18 participants. For this study, the primary themes are defined as themes mentioned by at least 12 of the 18 participants, which is 66 percent or more. The secondary themes are defined as themes mentioned by six to 11 of the 18 participants, which is 33 to 65 percent. The remaining notable theme in the study was mentioned by five participants, which is less than 33 percent.

The common themes described in Figure 3 assisted in answering the research question for this study, which is “How are universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions?”

Primary Themes

The primary themes of this study emerged into four areas of a crisis communications component, which include internships, case studies, managing the media, and ethics. Sixteen of the 18 participants stated that college internships were beneficial. All six professors and ten of the 12 graduates indicated college internships as a hands-on instructional tool. “Our internship program is very strong and students are required to have at least one internship, which makes them more marketable when they graduate,” said Professor Yellow. “I worked for [event name] tennis tournament and not only helped plan the event, but helped promote it as well,” said Red Graduate I. “This valuable experience enabled me to apply what I learned in college and gave me experience to get a full-time job.” Professor Orange emphasized internships in the University Orange public relations curriculum and both Orange Graduates mentioned the importance of their internships and how their internships helped them get their first jobs. “Some of the things that were really good and encouraged in college had real life applications like internships,” said Orange Graduate II. “I did an internship with [a major hockey team’s] public relations department and received college credit as well as hands-on experience.” Blue Graduate II said, “My alma mater is big on internships and networking with local professionals, which is a great experience because they provide real life situations.” Professor White stressed the value of students having an internship during college so that they are better equipped for the real world. “Students need to experience an actual crisis so that they can feel the heat and uncertainty that comes with conflict management,” said Professor White. “We have an active internship program that fulfills this need.”

Of the 18 participants, 15 emphasized the importance of reviewing case studies as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Five professors and ten graduates agreed that case studies provided real-life experiences regarding crisis communications. Professor Green and both Green Graduates spoke of case studies as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. “Case studies encourage students to work in groups,” said Professor Green. “We look at a case study in class, then I usually divide the students into groups so that they can discuss how they would vary the public relations input to improve the outcome of the case.” Blue Graduate II also remembers her case study instruction. “Of the things I remember in college, I recall the case studies the most because they were valuable to refer to when I began working,” said Blue Graduate II. “I remember how everyone in class would present case studies and we would all learn from each other, which is an effective way to teach crisis communications.”

With the Tylenol case being highlighted by all 15 participants who mentioned case studies, Green Graduate II recalls her case study. “In the Tylenol case, the company could have been destroyed but instead, they became forerunners of their industry with their safety seals,” said Green Graduate II. “They took a tremendously negative situation and turned lemons into lemonade.” Referring to case study instruction, Yellow Graduate II said, “We reviewed case studies like September 11 and the Tylenol case and looked at scenarios that really took place on a day-to-day basis and that was very helpful.” Red Graduate I also emphasized the importance of case study instruction. “The crisis communications courses had the greatest impact on me in college because we studied real life situations such as the Tylenol case,” said Red Graduate I.

Fourteen of the 18 participants in the study believed that it was essential to know how to work effectively with the media during a time of crisis. Five of the professors and nine of the graduates agreed that media relations training is a key component to crisis communications. Professor Blue, who said that crises are what mold the perception of public relations, stressed the importance of being able to handle a crisis. “Being able to work with the media is essential to a public relations professional’s success,” said Professor Blue. “Any classroom experience that will help students to understand how to deal with a crisis and the media is important.” Managing the media during a crisis was also an important topic to Professor White, who believes that when responding to the media, public relations professionals must be honest. “You have to stay in control of the media, who have the questions but you have the answers, which is knowledge,” said Professor White. “I teach my students to tell reporters to not ask for a conclusion that they can’t draw.” White Graduate II said, “The media is always going to be on hand after a disaster and they are typically looking for blood.” Red Graduate I supported this sentiment. “The most valuable lesson I learned in college was to constantly communicate with the media because they are the gatekeepers and if you work with them they will do their best to give you objective coverage of the story,” said Red Graduate I. “However, if you’re against them, they will pick up on it right away and automatically work against you.”

Thirteen of the 18 participants stressed the importance of ethical behavior in the public relations profession. Five professors and eight graduates mentioned the importance of ethics during their interviews. The issue of ethics struck a cord with Professor Orange and both Orange Graduates. All three participants said that ethics was

taught throughout the entire public relations curriculum at University Orange. Professor Orange said that he tells his students that all they really have in life is their credibility and once they lose that, “they’re cooked.” Both Orange Graduates said that during their public relations instruction at University Orange, they learned if a company is not ethical, they will lose credibility and will probably never get it back. The professors in this study were most expressive about ethics. Professor Yellow stressed that ethics, like crisis communications, should be incorporated into every public relations course. “If you’re not ethical, you shouldn’t be in the public relations profession,” said Professor Yellow. “I have never in my 40 years of public relations experience, lied to the media.” Professor Blue explained that the overall mission of University Blue’s public relations program incorporates ethics. “Sometimes when students role play an unethical solution in response to a crisis situation, I tell them that while their solution deals with the crisis at hand, they’re going to have another crisis because their solution is unethical.”

Secondary Themes

The secondary themes of this study emerged into another four areas of the crisis communications component. The four themes include teamwork, public relations strategic planning, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), and role playing. Of the 18 participants, ten emphasized the importance of including teamwork as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Three professors and seven graduates agreed that teamwork should be included in the public relations program because they have discovered its importance in the workplace. Professor Blue and both Blue Graduates mentioned the effectiveness of working in teams. “Sometimes I divide

the class into groups and give them a class period or two and have them work in groups as a team on a crisis situation,” said Professor Blue. “Students need to learn to work in teams because when they graduate and start working in their professions and a real crisis happens, they’ll be forced to work in teams to get through the crisis.” Yellow Graduate II agrees with the benefit of learning to work in teams. “My crisis communications class was very team oriented so we worked in teams and that’s how you work in the real world,” said Yellow Graduate II. “You have to learn how to structure things and how to give orders and how to take orders.”

Nine of the 18 participants stated the importance of learning how to develop a public relations strategic plan. Three professors and six graduates expressed the need for public relations planning. Professor Red, who defines a crisis as anything that threatens an organization’s reputation or public trust, emphasized the importance of having a public relations plan and being proactive with the media. “I tell my students that when they begin a new job, one of the first things they should do is develop a plan of action in case a crisis situation arises,” said Professor Red. “The plan may not fit the actual crisis when one occurs but it can quickly be adjusted to do so.” Red Graduate II agrees with the need for a plan. “You see a lot of situations botched up because the corporations don’t have a crisis communications plan in place and/or there isn’t a person on board who has had crisis communications instruction or experience,” said Red Graduate II. “They don’t have a crisis communications team in place.”

Professor Green, who believes that crises are not only challenges but are actually opportunities, emphasizes strategic thinking and public relations planning when teaching his crisis communications courses. “Basic public relations principles such as being a

strategic thinker, benefits public relations graduates in all aspects of their profession, especially when handling a crisis situation,” said Professor Green. Green Graduate I agreed with the importance of planning for a crisis. “In college, I learned to apply the thought-process of strategic planning, from being proactive when planning events, to being reactive when working with the media,” said Green Graduate I. “When I got my job after college, one of my first assignments was to write a crisis plan and I referred back to my class materials and textbooks to develop the plan,” said Blue Graduate I.

Of the 18 participants, eight emphasized the benefits of participating in the student organization, Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). Three professors and five graduates agreed that PRSSA was a beneficial organization for public relations students. Blue Graduate I said, “My university’s public relations program emphasized group work such as the student organization that helped non-profit groups as well as PRSSA’s Bateman Team, which was a group competition in dealing with a crisis situation.” Also mentioning the value of PRSSA, Blue Graduate II said, “I loved working on the Bateman Team because I learned something very useful for my career, I received college credit hours for it, and when we won a national award for our crisis campaign, it looked good on my resume.” Yellow Graduate I said, “I thought PRSSA was very beneficial during college.”

Of the 18 participants, six emphasized the importance of role playing as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Three professors and three graduates agreed that role playing should be included in the university public relations program. Referring to role playing the Tylenol case, Red Graduate I said, “We partnered up and acted like we were responding to the media just like the Tylenol public relations

people did 20 years ago, then we discussed and evaluated our performances with the hypothetical media in class.” Using role playing as an instructional tool, Professor White said, “I use role playing to make case studies more realistic to students.” Remembering her role playing the Tylenol case, White Graduate I said, “I remember role playing and case studies in college.”

Notable Theme

One other theme emerged following the secondary themes. It includes the benefit of having a minor with the major degree. Of the 18 participants, five mentioned that having a minor degree was beneficial for a public relations professional. One professor and four graduates agreed that this was important. “I declared my major in Organizational Communications in my freshman year,” said White Graduate I. “I realized it would be an asset to have an understanding of another language so I declared my minor in Spanish during my junior year.” White Graduate II said, “My minor in Business Management has helped me better understand the financial end of my company and I feel more prepared to communicate to our internal and external audiences when a crisis occurs.” Graduating with a major in Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, Orange Graduate I’s minor was Spanish. “My minor has been beneficial because I frequently communicate with Spanish-speaking media and employees at my client’s resorts,” said Orange Graduate I.

The next chapter provides a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations for this study of how universities in the West South Central states that

offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, are preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions.

CHAPTER V

Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations for this study. The study examined how universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations prepare graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their professions.

Summary of Findings

Background, Need for Study, Population and Methodology

Public relations professionals must be able to appropriately respond to a crisis on behalf of their organization. With the growing demand for public relations professionals to take a lead role in managing crisis situations, it is essential for universities to respond to this demand by preparing public relations students when they enter the public relations field for real world experiences. In response to this issue, a pilot study was conducted comparing Oklahoma's university public relations programs and it was discovered that only two of the 21 universities actually offered a crisis communications component. With organizational crises on the rise and with less than 10% of Oklahoma's universities providing undergraduate public relations students with a crisis communications component, the need for crisis communications expertise outweighs the response. This pilot study examined the procedures Oklahoma universities used when teaching crisis communications and reviewed students' responses to the instruction.

The pilot provoked interest that there might be similar patterns throughout the United States, so the pilot study was expanded to the other three states in the West South Central region—Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. To identify the population and sample, content analysis was used by going on-line to the World Wide Web to find the universities in these states that offer baccalaureate degrees. Then, by going directly to the web sites of every university that offered baccalaureate degrees, the schools that had public relations programs were identified. The universities' public relations curriculum were reviewed to determine which schools in the West South Central region offered a crisis communications component.

The content analysis process identified two universities in Louisiana and Oklahoma that included crisis communication in their undergraduate public relations program. Purposeful selection was used to select two of the five Texas schools identified through the content analysis for the study. Since Arkansas did not offer a crisis communications component to its public relations students, only three states, with two schools each, were included in this study. Therefore, the participants were from six universities. In total, there were six professors (one from each school) and 12 former students (two from each school). Each of the six individual case studies was comprised of a professor who taught crisis communications, as well as two former students who have graduated and have been in the public relations profession three-to-five years, and artifacts such as course syllabi, textbooks, and class assignments.

Common Themes for Each of the Six Cases

The data from the six individual cases includes the triangulation of the professor interviews, the graduate interviews, and the artifacts such as course syllabi, textbooks, and class assignments. These data were collected and analyzed for common themes. As illustrated in Figure 2 (refer to Chapter III), the data for each of the six universities were individually coded and separated into primary and secondary themes.

University Red's crisis communications component was reviewed and common themes surfaced from interviews with the professor and two graduates as well as course artifacts. In fact, five themes emerged with Professor Red and the two Red Graduates. The common themes included positioning instruction as a real life experience, using case studies as instructional tools, teamwork as an instructional tool, developing a crisis communications plan, and managing the media.

University White's crisis communications component was reviewed and five common themes were identified from interviews with Professor White and the White Graduates. During their interviews, Professor White and both White Graduates mentioned three of the themes, which include crisis communications instruction, degree minors, and managing the media. The other two themes, which included college internships and role playing, were mentioned by the professor and one of the graduates.

Five common themes were identified while reviewing University Blue's crisis communications component from the interviews with Professor Blue and both Blue Graduates. These themes included managing the media, college internships, case study instruction, teamwork as an instructional tool, and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession.

In reviewing University Green's crisis communications component, interviews with Professor Green and both Green Graduates revealed four common themes. These themes included developing a crisis communications plan, case study instruction, college internships, and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession.

While reviewing University Yellow's crisis communications component, five common themes surfaced as a result of the interviews with Professor Yellow and both Yellow Graduates. These themes included developing a crisis communications plan, case study instruction, college internships, the benefits of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession.

University Orange's crisis communications component was reviewed and four common themes surfaced from interviews with Professor Orange and the two Orange Graduates. These themes included college internships, case study instruction, teamwork as an instructional tool, and the importance of ethics in the public relations profession.

Common Themes Between and Among the Cases

The previous section focused on the six individual cases in this study. This section will focus on the multiple case component of this study and on the common themes between and among the six cases. With common themes emerging for each of the six universities, it is also interesting to review the common themes that surfaced among and between all of these universities from the interviews and artifact data. As depicted in Figure 3 (refer to Chapter III), the data for all six universities were analyzed and reported as primary and secondary themes. In total, nine themes emerged from this study. Of these nine themes, four were primary (identified by at least 16 participants), four were

secondary (identified by six to 11 participants), and one was notable (identified by five or fewer participants). None of the themes that emerged in this study were mentioned by all 18 participants.

Primary Themes

The four primary themes of this study included internships, case studies, managing the media, and ethics. Sixteen of the 18 participants stated that college internships were beneficial. All six professors and ten of the 12 graduates indicated college internships as a hands-on instructional tool. All six of the universities offered internships in their course descriptions.

Of the 18 participants, 15 emphasized the importance of reviewing case studies as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Five professors and ten graduates agreed that case studies provided real-life experiences for crisis communications instruction. Case study instruction was mentioned in the course descriptions of all six universities.

Fourteen of the 18 participants in the study believed that it was essential to know how to work effectively with the media during a time of crisis. Five of the professors and nine of the graduates agreed that media relations training is a key component in crisis communications. All six universities offered media relations as a course in their curriculum.

Thirteen of the 18 participants stressed the importance of ethical behavior in the public relations profession. Five professors and eight graduates mentioned the

importance of ethics during their interviews. Three of the six universities mentioned ethics in their syllabi.

Secondary Themes

The secondary themes of this study emerged into another four areas of crisis communications. The four themes included teamwork, public relations strategic planning, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), and role playing.

Of the 18 participants, ten emphasized the importance of including teamwork as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Three professors and seven graduates agreed that teamwork should be included in the public relations program because they have discovered its importance in the workplace. All six universities mentioned teamwork, such as group discussions or group assignments, in their syllabi. Nine of the 18 participants stated the importance of learning how to develop a public relations strategic plan. Three professors and six graduates expressed the need for public relations planning. Four of the six universities mentioned strategic planning in their syllabi. Of the 18 participants, eight emphasized the benefits of participating in the student organization, Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). Three professors and five graduates agreed that PRSSA was a beneficial organization for public relations students. Two of the six universities mentioned PRSSA in their syllabi. Of the 18 participants, six emphasized the importance of role playing as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Three professors and three graduates agreed that role playing should be included in the university public relations program. Four of the six universities mentioned role playing in their syllabi.

Notable Theme

Following the secondary themes, one notable theme emerged. It included the benefit of having a minor with the major degree. Of the 18 participants, five mentioned that having a minor degree was beneficial for a public relations professional. One professor and four graduates agreed that this was important.

Conclusions

This section will compare the study findings with the literature reviewed for the study. Nine themes were identified in the previous section. They included four primary themes, which are internships, case studies, managing the media, and ethics. Four secondary themes emerged as well and include teamwork, public relations strategic planning, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), and role playing. The one remaining notable theme includes the benefit of having a minor with the major degree.

The review of the literature for this study focuses on research regarding public relations and crisis communications. The three areas reviewed included teaching of public relations, crisis management in the real world, and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). A prelude to these three sections is an overview of the history of public relations, which provides a background on the public relations profession and presents an historical context for understanding theoretical positions regarding best practice.

All eight primary and secondary themes that emerged in this study relate to the literature reviewed for this study. For instance, Bernays (Seitel, 1998), who is often

called the father of public relations, mentioned the benefit of hands-on experience in learning how to handle a crisis. Bernays supports college internships, which was the leading theme and was highlighted by 16 participants in the study. In addition, Professor White stressed the value of students having an internship during college so that they are better equipped for the real world. “Students need to experience an actual crisis so that they can feel the heat and uncertainty that comes with conflict management,” said Professor White. “We have an active internship program that fulfills this need.”

Case study instruction was supported by the literature review in a survey conducted by the Association for Education in Journalism (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). This survey of 99 mass communication professors from universities in the United States that offer public relations undergraduate degrees, revealed that 87% of the respondents said the university campaigns course, which focuses on real life case studies, was the capstone course for the mass communication major. In addition, William Adams, Associate Professor at Florida International University School of Journalism and Mass Communication said, “Case studies serve as idea resources for public relations practitioners in solving problems and for public relations scholars in theory building. Through class discussions of the situations and people in the cases, students will hone their insights, perceptions, thought processes and interpersonal skills” (p. 52). Case study instruction also was mentioned in this study as the second leading theme and mentioned by 15 participants. Red Graduate I supported the importance of case studies and said, “The crisis communications courses had the greatest impact on me in college because we studied real life situations such as the Tylenol case.”

Also cited in the literature review, Adams (1993) used teamwork to review case studies and to conduct role playing in the classroom. Adams highlights reasons for professors to encourage team participation in the classroom. They include the socialization of group interaction; alleviation of the Atlas Complex where the instructor tries to do it all, risking ineffectiveness and burnout; and the opportunity for students to face group related problems, which they will encounter when they enter the public relations field. Teamwork instruction also was mentioned by 10 participants in the study. “Students need to learn to work in teams because when they graduate and start working in their professions and a real crisis happens, they’ll be forced to work in teams to get through the crisis,” said Professor Blue. Another graduate in the study also agrees with the benefit of learning to work in teams. “My crisis communications class was very team oriented so we worked in teams and that’s how you work in the real world,” said Yellow Graduate II. “You have to learn how to structure things and how to give orders and how to take orders.”

Melissa Motschall, English Language Department at Eastern Michigan University and Michele Najor, Mass Communication Department at Wayne State University, both teach public relations courses at their respective universities. Motschall and Najor (Motschall & Najor, 2001) agree that the interactive exercise of role playing is a key learning tool for handling crisis communications situations. They said that students can either create crises for one another, or the professor may develop a bank of crises and opportunities from which to draw. The interactive exercise of role playing was a secondary theme in this study and was mentioned by six participants. Using role playing

as an instructional tool, Professor White said, “I use role playing to make case studies more realistic to students.”

Motschall and Najor (2001) describe their client-centered approach to teaching the introductory mass communication course in this study’s literature review. “Students should know general principles of crisis communications, such as promptness and honest, open communication and they should also understand the importance of having in place a crisis plan, crisis team, and single spokesperson” (p. 22). “With these guidelines in mind, requiring students to respond to a real crisis for their clients, within a specified time frame, can be a valuable and interesting exercise.” Lin, Stacks and Steinfatt (1992, p. 46), three University of Miami Communication Professors stated that the key to crisis management is developing a plan prior to the crisis that manages various public perceptions of the crisis. They said that an effective crisis management plan is a well-thought-out campaign that seeks to reduce any negative impact, while generating positive outcomes during a crisis period. Nine participants in the study also stressed the importance of learning how to develop a public relations strategic plan. A graduate in the study agreed with the importance of planning for a crisis. “In college, I learned to apply the thought-process of strategic planning, from being proactive when planning events, to being reactive when working with the media,” said Green Graduate I.

Ethics also was highlighted in the literature. Ivy Lee, who became a public relations professional in 1903 and is often considered to be America’s first successful public relations counselor, was credited with discovering that the best way to influence public opinion was through honesty and candor (Seitel, 1998). He believed that simple truth is key. Ethics was mentioned by 13 participants and is a primary theme in this

study. Aligned with these participants as well as Lee's sentiment, Professor Orange said, "I tell my students that all they really have in life is their credibility and once they lose that, they're cooked." Professor Yellow agreed when he said, "If you're not ethical, you shouldn't be in the public relations profession." He continued, "I have never in my 40 years of public relations experience, lied to the media."

In reference to the media, Kathleen Fern-Banks, Mass Communication professor at the University of Washington who was featured in this study's literature review, cited media relations training as a key component in crisis communications (Fern-Banks, 2002). She said that information about a crisis reaches the public through the media more often than by any other means. Fern-Banks said that with the media demanding a quick response to a crisis, it is important for the public relations professional to anticipate what the media want to know. Fourteen participants also designated media relations training as a key component in crisis communications and as a primary theme for this study. "The most valuable lesson I learned in college was to constantly communicate with the media because they are the gatekeepers and if you work with them they will do their best to give you objective coverage of the story," said Red Graduate I. "However, if you're against them, they will pick up on it right away and automatically work against you."

The student organization Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) also was mentioned in the study's literature review (<http://www.prsa.org>). The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) founded PRSSA to cultivate a relationship between students and professional public relations practitioners. PRSSA was a secondary theme recognized by eight participants in the study. Mentioning the value of PRSSA, Blue Graduate II said, "I loved working on PRSSA's Bateman Team because I learned

something very useful for my career, I received college credit hours for it, and when we won a national award for our crisis campaign, it looked good on my resume.”

There is existing literature related to public relations and crisis communications. However, this study confirms a void in literature regarding a crisis communications component in baccalaureate public relations programs at universities in the West South Central region of the United States.

Recommendations

Since there is little data on the crisis communications component in university public relations programs in the United States, I recommend the following four future studies. The first study would explore crisis communications components, such as seminars and workshops that are sponsored by PRSSA at universities in the United States. This study is recommended because PRSSA is a leading organization for public relations undergraduate students. PRSSA is the most likely organization to conduct the research, convey its findings to industry leaders, and apply its findings to enhance public relations undergraduate students’ understanding of crisis communications. In addition, a manager of PRSA, the parent organization of PRSSA, seemed interested in my study when she said, “[Jami], you are on to something,” regarding my study of the university crisis communications component.

The second study would replicate this study in another area of the United States such as the East North Central Region, which includes Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin. This parallel study would be important because it would reveal if universities that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations in another region of the

United States is preparing their graduates to manage crisis communications situations. It would be enlightening to compare and contrast these two regions' crisis communications components.

The third study would focus on why the other 90 percent of universities in the West South Central region of the United States do not offer a crisis communications component in their public relations program. It would be interesting to understand why the universities in this region do not offer a crisis communications component. It is important to understand the premise of a university undergraduate public relations program before it can be revised to include a crisis communications component.

The fourth recommended study would focus on the concept of ethics. One of the 16 questions asked of the participants in this current study focused on ethics. Responses to the ethics question provided the strongest reaction from both the professors and graduates. Due to this response, the recommended study would explore how ethics are incorporated into undergraduate public relations programs with a crisis communications component. Based on the theories of Immanuel Kant, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Carol Gilligan, the study would research how public relations graduates are prepared to handle ethical situations once they enter their professions. The study would explore whether public relations professionals make ethical decisions based on their own values or on their employer's directives. In addition, the study would ask graduates if they believed ethics could be taught.

The study would use models based on studies of students' intellectual development, which help instructors adjust their instruction to the stage of maturity of an individual student and to design ways of increasing the students' rate of development

(Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2000). Since Immanuel Kant's views on ethics are widely studied, it would be interesting to consider his views on moral education. Kant's claim that the primary aim of moral education is the formation of character derives from the premise of his moral philosophy. His philosophy is that nothing can be regarded as good without qualification except a good will, whose constitution is character (Cahn, 1997). Having a significant influence on the study of college's impact on students and on institutional policies and programs designed to shape student development, Kohlberg's theory of moral development focuses on cognitive processes by which moral choices are made (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Carol Gilligan in her different voice model, observed persistent discrepancies between women's concepts of self and morality and the major theories of human and moral development, particularly Kohlberg's theory. Gilligan suggests the problem lies not with women but with conceptually biased theories, all of which emerged from studies of the moral development of male subjects (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Gilligan believes that women's concern with the well-being of others constitutes a different voice from that used by males. She believes that women's moral reasoning is in the "care voice," while men reason in the "justice voice." The differences between Kohlberg and Gilligan are the differences between the morality of rights and the morality of responsibility, between concepts of autonomy and separation and concepts of connectedness and relationships.

Program Recommendations

This section includes two areas of program recommendations. The first area focuses on revisions for undergraduate programs. The second area focuses on the leadership role of public relations professional organizations with undergraduate public relations programs.

Undergraduate Programs

Based on my research of the crisis communications components of university undergraduate public relations programs, I offer recommendations for designing crisis communications courses. For instance, I suggest that internships be incorporated into public relations programs. With 16 of the 18 participants in the study supporting college internships, this clearly was the leading theme. With the participants mentioning that one of the key benefits of an internship is the hands-on experience of learning how to handle a crisis, internships can be developed with local businesses as well as non-profit agencies. Internship programs enable students to earn credit hours as well as gain practical experience in dealing with crises. Professor White stressed the value of students having an internship during college so that they are better equipped for the real world. “Students need to experience an actual crisis so that they can feel the heat and uncertainty that comes with conflict management,” said Professor White.

Another recommendation regards crisis communications instruction. With 15 of the 18 participants emphasizing the importance of reviewing case studies as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications, case studies was the second leading theme in the study. And, with 15 of the 18 participants highlighting the Tylenol case, I

recommend that public relations programs specifically include this case study in their instruction. The Tylenol case, which is a positive example of crisis communications, left a lasting impression on the graduates. Blue Graduate II remembers her case study instruction. “Of the things I remember in college, I recall the case studies the most because they were valuable to refer to when I began working,” said Blue Graduate II. “I remember how everyone in class would present case studies and we would all learn from each other, which is an effective way to teach crisis communications.”

Coinciding with case study instruction is role playing, which was often mentioned in the study as a tool used to review case studies in the classroom. Of the 18 participants, six emphasized the importance of role playing as an instructional tool for teaching crisis communications. Role playing was cited as an effective hands-on method of experiencing a crisis situation. By role playing, students are able to express how they would react in the time of a crisis by portraying a public relations professional. I suggest that university public relations programs integrate role playing in their curriculum. Students could act out actual case studies in class and then critique each other. These role playing and critique sessions provide experiential learning. Referring to role playing the Tylenol case, Red Graduate I said, “We partnered up and acted like we were responding to the media just like the Tylenol public relations people did 20 years ago, then we discussed and evaluated our performances with the hypothetical media in class.”

I also suggest that university public relations programs provide instruction on developing a strategic crisis communications plan as well as on working with the media in a time of crisis. Nine participants stated the importance of knowing how to develop a public relations strategic plan and 14 participants mentioned the importance of working

effectively with the media during a time of crisis. Strategic planning and media training, which go hand-in-hand, were perceived as essential to participants in the study. “When I got my job after college, one of my first assignments was to write a crisis plan and I referred back to my class materials and textbooks to develop the plan,” said Blue Graduate I. Red Graduate I supported this sentiment. “The most valuable lesson I learned in college was to constantly communicate with the media because they are the gatekeepers and if you work with them they will do their best to give you objective coverage of the story,” said Red Graduate I. “However, if you’re against them, they will pick up on it right away and automatically work against you.”

In addition, I suggest that ethics be incorporated into all of the public relations programs. Thirteen of the 18 participants stressed the importance of ethical behavior in the public relations profession. The professors in this study were most expressive about ethics. Professor Yellow stressed that ethics, like crisis communications, should be incorporated into every public relations course. “If you’re not ethical, you shouldn’t be in the public relations profession,” said Professor Yellow. Professor Orange said that he tells his students that all they really have in life is their credibility and once they lose that, “they’re cooked.”

Public Relations Professional Organization

During the final stage of my dissertation, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast affecting Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Even in the initial aftermath of this storm, it unofficially has been branded the worst natural disaster in United States history. One of the issues frequently discussed both through print and broadcast media is

the lack of an effective crisis communications plan. This reinforces the importance of crisis management components in both undergraduate and in-service programs. It would be an important and enlightening study to examine the communications before, during, and after the hurricane struck. I recommend that public relations organizations such as PRSA continue to regularly offer crisis communications workshops and seminars to its members. I also recommend that the public relations organizations take the leadership role of incorporating research-based findings, such as those from this study, in the undergraduate preparation programs with individuals interested in working in the public relations profession.

Summary

It is interesting that ethics is one of the primary themes that emerged in this study. It is my hope that public relations professionals make a concerted effort to maintain the honor and credibility of the profession that our forefather Ivy Lee worked so hard to develop. Lee transformed the field from a questionable pursuit into a professional discipline designed to win public confidence and trust through communications based on openness and truth. We have a responsibility to support his belief and continue his practice. Whether customers, employees, shareholders, students, parents, and the media, public relations professionals must communicate openly and honestly, accurately and timely to their audiences in times of crises and otherwise.

Likewise, it is up to university public relations programs to incorporate a crisis communications component into their curriculum. The profession requires entry-level employees to be prepared to handle crises when they enter their careers, so university

public relations programs should support this need. They should do so with interactive in-class exercises such as case study and role playing instruction and encourage outside classroom activities that provide hands-on experiences such as internships and student organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSSA). In addition, professors should teach students to be proactive when they enter their professions by developing crisis communications plans in their organizations as well as learn to work in teams and communicate with the media.

Let us remember another industry pioneer Edward Bernays, who died in 1995 at the age of 103, and was a giant in the public relations field for nearly a century. Beginning as a publicist in 1913, he owned a public relations firm and taught the first course in public relations at New York University in 1923. A nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays pioneered the application of the social sciences to public relations. Historian Eric Goldman credited Bernays with moving along with the most advanced trends in the public relations field, thinking with, around, and ahead of them. Maintaining credibility and honor, public relations professionals should be in sync with Bernays, by looking to the future while teaching public relations students to do the same.

References

- Adams, W. C. (1993). Using case studies in the introductory public relations course. Florida International University.
- Benigni, V. L. & Cameron, G. T. (1999). Teaching PR campaigns: The current state of the art. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 54 (2), 50-60.
- Berstein, J.M. (1994). Discussion and learning skills in an introductory course. *Journalism Educator*, 49 (1), 39-48.
- Cahn, S.M. (1997). *Classic and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Education*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Caputo, D.A. (2001). We were there on 9/11 and afterward. *Trusteeship*, 9 (6), 8-13.
- Cook, B. (2004). *The UPI Stylebook and Guide to Newswriting*. Washington, D.C.: United Press International.
- Cook, G. (2001). The media and the message. *American School Journal*, 188 (6), 8-13.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1994). *The Unseen Power: Public Relations. A History*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1995). *Public Relations History: From the 17th to the 20th Century. The Antecedents*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Fern-Banks, K. (2002). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2000). *How to design & evaluate research in education*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

- Goodman, A. & Goodman, D. (2004). *The exception to the rulers: Exposing oily politicians, war profiteers, and the media that love them*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Griffiths, D. (1996). Teaching journalism skills courses to new public relations majors. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 51 (1), 82-86.
- Grunig, J.E. (1989). Teaching Public Relations in the Future. *Public Relations Review*, Spring, 16.
- Grunig, J.G. (1990). IABC Study Shows CEO Value PR. *IABC Communication World*, August, 2.
- Joyce, B., Weil, M., & Calhoun, E. (2000). *Models of Teaching*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kinnick, K.N. (1993). Teaching public relations management: The current state of the art. Georgia.
- Lerbinger, O. (1997). *The Crisis Manager: Facing Risk and Responsibility*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Lesly, P. (1981). Report and Recommendations: Task Force on Stature and Role of Public Relations. *Public Relations Journal*, March, 32.
- Liebert, R.B. (1996). How Safe is Your Job? *Fortune Magazine*, April, 76.
- Lin, H.M., Stacks, D.W. & Steinfatt, T.M. (1992). Crisis management planning in corporate Taiwan. *Proceedings of the 9th Annual Intercultural and International Communication Conference*. Miami, FL: University of Miami, 45-48.
- Lordan, E. J. (1996). Building a bridge to the business world: A guide to designing group projects for public relations courses. Pennsylvania.

- Lubbers, C.A. (2002). Using alternative teaching techniques to enhance student performance in the traditional introductory public relations course. *Public Relations Review*, 28 (2), 157-66.
- Marconi, J. (2004). *Public Relations: The Complete Guide*. Mason, OH: South-Western Educational Publishing.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Millar, D.P. & Heath, R.L. (2004). *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Najor, M. A. & Motschall, M. (2001). The client-centered approach as a foundation for teaching the introductory course in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 27 (1), 3-25.
- O'Dwyer, J. (1996). 1996 PR Fee Income of 50 Firms. *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report*, March, 5.
- Panici, D. A. (1998). New media and the introductory mass communication course. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 53 (1), 52-63.
- Pascarella, E.T. & Terenzini, P.T. (1991). *How College Affects Students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Pearson, R. (1990). Perspectives on public relations history. *Public Relations Review*, 16 (3), 27-35.
- Ruff, P. & Aziz, K. (2003). *Managing Communications in a Crisis*. Burlington, VT: Gower Publishing Company.

- Sallot, L. M. & DeSanto, B. J. (2004). *Learning to Teach: What You Need to Know to Develop a Successful Career as a Public Relations Educator*. New York, NY: PRSA.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*. Thousands, CA: Sage Publications.
- Seitel, F.P. (1998). *The Practice of Public Relations*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Terry, K. (1998). A general model of curriculum development for the department in transition. Nebraska.
- Vocate, D. R. (1997). Teaching communication theory in the professional school. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 52 (2), 4-14.
- Wilson, S. (2002). *Real people, real crisis: An inside look at corporate crisis communications*. Winchester, VA: Oakhill Press.

APPENDIX A

PROFESSOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

- 1) What is your position at the university?
- 2) How many years have you taught at the university?
- 3) How many courses does the university offer its public relations students that involve crisis communication instruction?
- 4) What are the names of the crisis communications courses?
- 5) Which of these courses do you teach?
- 6) Would you please provide a syllabus for each course? Does the syllabus outline the assignments as well as the names of the textbooks for the courses?
- 7) How many years has the university offered crisis communications courses?
- 8) Are the crisis communications courses required or electives?
- 9) What are the primary objectives of the crisis communications courses?
- 10) What are some interesting ways you teach crisis communications?
- 11) Can you tell me about any special student PR groups that would work w/clients?
- 12) If you were to rank the importance of crisis communications instruction at the university level, how would you prioritize this instruction?
- 13) How do you believe crisis communications instruction prepares public relations graduates for the “real world?”
- 14) Professor’s closing statement:
What is your goal in preparing public relations graduates for the “real world?”
- 15) I would like to speak to two of your graduates who took crisis communications courses? Would you please provide their names and telephone numbers?
- 16) Do you incorporate ethics into your crisis communications instruction and if so, how?

APPENDIX B

GRADUATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

- 1) What is your position at your present workplace? How long have you worked for this company and did you hold other positions before this one?
- 2) Please describe your duties in your position.
- 3) When did you graduate from college?
- 4) What was your major?
- 5) Did you begin your freshman year as a public relations major? When did you decide to major in public relations?
- 6) What were your favorite and/or most useful public relations courses?
- 7) Did you take any crisis communications courses?
- 8) What were the names of these courses and who taught them?
- 9) Have you been able to apply what you learned in these crisis communications courses to your career after graduation? Please explain.
- 10) What is the most valuable lesson you learned during your crisis communications instruction in college that you have been able to apply in your career?
- 11) What are some interesting ways crisis communications was taught in college?
- 12) Can you tell me about any special student public relations organizations during college where you worked with real clients? Did this experience help you after graduation in your career? Was it a realistic experience?
- 13) Was your crisis communications instruction positioned as a “real life” experience? In other words, did you find a connection between the theory of your textbooks with the practice of your assignments?
- 14) If you were to rank the importance of crisis communications instruction during college, how would you prioritize this instruction?
- 15) Did your crisis communications instruction prepare you for the “real world?”
- 16) Was ethics incorporated into your crisis communications instruction during your undergraduate public relations program?

Below are follow-up questions if the graduate answers “yes” to question #16 :

- How was ethics incorporated into your program?
- Have you had any situations since you graduated and entered your public relations profession, where this instruction assisted you?

Below is a follow-up question if the graduate answers “no” to question #16:

- Have you had any situations since you graduated and entered your public relations profession where ethics instruction might have assisted you? Explain.