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Commission on Public Relations Education Issues

Recommendations for Undergraduate Public Relations Education

Based on 2023 Signature Study of Future of Workforce

To succeed in today's public relations workplace, graduating public relations students should be critical strategic thinkers, have a solid grounding in ethics, writing, and communication, complete an internship, and understand data analysis, DEI as an ethical social responsibility, and their role in driving social change.

Those are among the recommendations in the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE)'s 2023 Signature Report, *Navigating Change: Recommendations for Advancing Undergraduate Public Relations Education*. The report, generously underwritten by title sponsor The Weiss Family Trust (Audra Weiss and Jim Weiss, founder and board chair of RealChemistry), has been issued as part of CPRE's 50th anniversary year.

The CPRE report's recommendations highlight seven areas that practitioners and educators identified as critical to pre-professional preparation in the post-pandemic environment. Key recommendations include the following:

- **The Future of the Public Relations Workplace.** Educators and practitioners should work together to develop experiential learning opportunities for students. Educators should include case studies and other course content on the ethical challenges of contemporary practice. Employers must adapt their onboarding practices for new hires to better represent a new workplace.
- **Essential Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities and the Six-Course Standard.** Given that ethics is the top knowledge area, CPRE's recommended sixth course in public relations ethics must be required in

public relations curricula. It joins public relations courses in principles, research, writing, campaigns/cases, and internships.

- **Critical Strategic Thinking.** Public relations sequences must include critical strategic thinking, ideally using the DASA model (Detecting, Analyzing, Strategizing, Acting) and with real-world case studies to understand critical strategy.
- **Data Insights and Strategy.** Educators should integrate KSAs related to data analytics and AI into academic programs and build a solid foundation in quantitative and qualitative research for students. Educators also should teach students to align data analysis with measurable organizational outcomes and public relations objectives rather than low-level outputs.
- **Ethics.** Survey results indicated that our newest professionals are not adequately prepared to address public relations' ethical challenges and lack a personal code of ethics. Ethics should be a required course and educators should continue to incorporate ethics into all courses across the curriculum.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).** Educators should understand DEI as an ethical social responsibility to be embedded in the curriculum, take a comprehensive approach to DEI, create public relations DEI course materials, and prepare for pushback.
- **PR as a Driver of Social Change.** Educators must be courageous in addressing challenging issues such as gender identity, sexuality, racism, ableism, and poverty. They should ensure that their students understand their role in driving social change and consider how social change content can be integrated with skills-based and technical content.

The report represents over a year's involvement of the 65 CPRE board members as they participated in brainstorming sessions, crowdsourcing surveys, focus groups, and an omnibus quantitative survey of more than 460 public relations practitioners and educators. Seven teams of educators and practitioners contributed their expertise and content.

“This report of recommendations responded to what practitioners and educators felt were the highest priorities in 2022-23 for improving undergraduate public relations education,” said Dr. Elizabeth Toth, APR, Fellow PRSA, CPRE 2023 Signature Report Co-Chair. “We were impressed with their choices because they signaled high expectations of new practitioners to contribute more to organizational and client problem-solving through the wider knowledge of public relations' strategic/critical role in relationship building,” she added.

“New practitioners should arrive able to navigate a world that is changing dramatically through technology, social expectations, and a changed workplace,” noted Dr. Pamela Bourland-Davis, CPRE 2023 Signature Report Co-Chair. “These priorities should not be lost on educators

who are in the trenches with a generation (GenZ) of students who learn differently and have different expectations for their employment than did their instructors.”

The report’s golden anniversary sponsor is the Grossman Group (David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA). Other sponsors include the PR Council, Omnicom, M Booth, and the Department of Public Relations at the University of Florida’s College of Journalism and Communications.

The full report will be available Nov. 3 on the Commission on Public Relations Education’s website at <http://www.commissionpred.org/>.

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About CPRE: The Commission on Public Relations Education, the authoritative voice on public relations education, was founded in 1973 by the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and the Public Relations Society of America to address the quality of public relations education in the United States.

Since then, CPRE has issued periodic research reports and recommendations on undergraduate and graduate education in public relations for universities, accrediting bodies, and professional associations around the world. Today, with 24 member organizations in the U.S. and abroad, CPRE operates year-round as a 501(c)3 organization in partnership with the [Institute for Public Relations](#) and continues to offer a forum for public relations education with a global perspective.