The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) is composed of public relations educators and practitioners who represent several professional societies in public relations and related fields of communications. For several decades, the Commission has periodically presented recommendations on undergraduate and graduate public relations curricula and associated subjects. While graduate education has not been ignored in previous CPRE reports, it has gotten a rather cursory review. In fact, no comprehensive standards have been attempted in at least two decades. Yet, the PRSA Educational Affairs Committee is already offering graduate program certification. Thus, the Commission believes it to be in the long-term interests of the public relations profession that it offers standards for graduate education in public relations that reflect its body of knowledge and practice expectations.

Executive Summary

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Research Phase Approach to the Producing the Report of Standards

The Commission has completed a year-long program of research to learn about the kinds, delivery, and value of United States graduate public relations education.

Objectives
1. To obtain the perceptions of public relations employers/human resources directors of how they value graduate public relations/communication management education when seeking to hire.
2. To obtain the perceptions of executive-level public relations practitioners and academics of what should be the deliverables (knowledge, skills, abilities, instruction, job placement) of a Master’s degree in public relations/communication management.
3. To learn what (if any) graduate educational standards, certifications, accreditations, across universities are expected by executive-level public relations professionals and academics.
4. To obtain the perceptions of executive-level public relations practitioners and academics of whether graduate programs in public relations/communication management are preparing students to help lead the public relations/communication management field.
5. To learn whether and in what ways universities deliver systems (traditional, interdisciplinary, commercial on-line, hybrid) are valued by executive-level public relations practitioners and academics.
6. To provide a compendium of schools offering graduate programs in public relations/communication management, including curriculum, entrance requirements, target audiences, and whether accredited.

To achieve these objectives, the Commission collected a bibliography of secondary sources of information such as articles, research reports, websites, advertisements, and published commentary. It conducted an audit of the descriptions of graduate public relations programs found on university websites. It conducted a quantitative survey of public relations practitioners and academics to allow for greater representation and general perceptions of graduate public
relations/communication management programs. Finally, the Commission collected perceptions of public relations industry employers through the use of in-depth interviews.

Summary of First Stage – Results of Research

The Audit of Graduate Programs
- An increase from 2000 to 2011 in the number of graduate public relations programs from 26 to 75
- Wide variety of graduate program titles
- Lack of uniformity in admissions standards
- Lack of uniformity in total required credit hours
- Inconsistency in reference to a “capstone” program experience
- Lack of uniformity in curriculum across programs

Quantitative Survey of 400+ Public Relations Practitioners and Educators
- Knowledge categories grouped as “strategic management,” “business,” “theoretical foundations,” and “globalization”
- Most highly rated knowledge category was “ethics”
- Highest rated skill is “mastery of language in oral or written form”
- A comprehensive project completion rated highest as the culminating experience
- Split opinion on whether a master’s degree is important in hiring
- Higher ratings for a master’s program completion making a student eligible for research positions, and equivalent to three years of professional experience
- A variety of graduate program titles

Qualitative In-Depth Interviews with 21 Public Relations Industry Employers
- Employers emphasize “characteristics of applicants when hiring,” rather than knowledge or skills.
- Employers perceive public relations graduate education as preparation for entry-level jobs, but still expect professional experience.
- Employers recommend building a “better brand” for graduate public relations education.
- Employers interpret the “split” in the value of public relations graduate education in hiring in three ways: as a reflection on the difference in quality of graduate programs, likely higher ratings by educators than practitioners, and perhaps a generational change.

Next Stage: 2012: Development of a Report and Standards

The Commission’s next year will be spent developing a report of the status of graduate public relations education and recommended standards for graduate public relations education to be presented at the 2012 PRSA national conference in San Francisco. To achieve this report, the Commission has expanded its membership in order to have representatives of the academic and professional organizations that seek to advance public relations education. The Commission has invited at-large members as well who have expertise in graduate public relations education.

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