Journal of Public Relations Education

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Volume 11, Issue 2, Summer 2025

A publication of the Public Relations Division of AEJMC
ISSN 2573-1742

Volume 11, Issue 2, Summer 2025
A publication of the Public Relations Division of AEJMC
ISSN 2573-1742

Journal of Public Relations Education
Editorial Review Board

Journal of
Public Relations Education
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Volume 11, Issue 2, Summer 2025

Table of Contents

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 6-8

Letter from the Editor

It is our privilege to introduce this issue, which brings together timely scholarship on the evolving landscape of public relations and communication education. As the demands of the modern workplace continue to shift, driven by rapid technological innovation, changing employer expectations, and a renewed focus on equity and access, educators and students are challenged to adapt, innovate, and reflect critically on their practices and priorities. The three manuscripts featured in this issue each offer a distinct, research-driven perspective on how communication programs can best prepare students for professional success while addressing the complexities of today's media and public relations industries.

The first teaching brief, "AI Hackathon: Igniting and Connecting Students' Generative AI Knowledge," explores the integration of artificial intelligence into public relations pedagogy through the use of classroom hackathons. This innovative approach not only demystifies generative AI for students but also provides a hands-on, collaborative environment where technical skills, creativity, and ethical considerations intersect. The findings demonstrate that such experiential learning models can foster both technical competence and critical thinking, equipping students to navigate a workplace increasingly shaped by AI tools and practices.

Our second contribution, "Facilitating Students' Career Readiness Through Social Media Micro-internships with On-Campus Clients," addresses another pressing need: equitable access to meaningful professional experiences. By embedding micro-internships within the curriculum and partnering with real, on-campus clients, this model provides students—especially first-generation college students—with opportunities to develop both technical and soft skills in authentic work settings. The evidence presented here underscores the value of experiential learning, mentorship, and inclusive practices in bridging the gap between academic preparation and career readiness, while also highlighting the

importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in communication strategy.

The third paper, "Mandate of Professionalization: Serial Interns, Self-Branding and Invisible Laborers in the PR and Media Industries," offers a critical examination of the internship economy and the pressures facing early career professionals. Through in-depth interviews, the study reveals how students often prioritize organizational prestige and self-branding over substantive skill development, sometimes at the expense of their own well-being and professional growth. The research recommends more structured mentoring, clear ethical guidelines, and a rebalancing of educational objectives to ensure that internships serve as genuine sites of learning and professional development, rather than merely providing credentials for employability.

Taken together, these papers illuminate the multifaceted challenges and opportunities facing public relations and communication education today. They remind us that preparing students for the future requires more than technical proficiency or a polished resume; it demands critical engagement with new technologies, a commitment to inclusivity, and an honest reckoning with the structures that shape professional development.

Additionally, in this issue, we honor our immediate past Editor-in-Chief, Pamela Bourland-Davis, who passed away suddenly in May, leaving a huge hole in our hearts in the PR pedagogy community. The loss of her mentorship is deeply felt by our editorial staff at JPRE. Her impact was immense. I've already cried twice today writing this editorial note. Please read additional moving tributes to Pam on the JPRE website, the PRD community pages, and in the summer newsletter, and find a way to honor her in your life and teaching practice.

Now, Pam would not have wanted me to end on a sad note; she would have wanted us to continue celebrating our incredible scholars with joyful enthusiasm. And so, our final addition to this issue is the announcement of the 2024-2025 JPRE awards. In 2024, thanks to our incredible sponsors, we were able to add two named awards to celebrate our contributors. In May, JPRE also established an editorial leadership award, which we are presenting for the first time to honor Dr. Bourland-Davis and her mentorship of our editorial staff.

Without further ado:

- Our longest-standing award was created by our first editor-in-chief, Chuck Lubbers. **The Chuck Lubbers Award for Pedagogical Research** honors our top JPRE article of the year. This year, the award goes to: Stephanie Madden & Kate Guastaferro for "Public relations isn't all rainbows and butterflies": Student experiences in developing a child sexual abuse prevention campaign (10-2)
- **The Stan Richards School of Advertising & Public Relations – Moody College, University of Texas Top Quality Reviewer Award** goes to: Katie Place, Quinnipiac University, for her excellence in timely reviews and rich feedback to authors submitting to JPRE.
- The **Top Ethics in PR Pedagogy Paper Award for the Journal of Public Relations Education (JPRE)** is sponsored by the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication and goes to: Alec Tefertiller, Rosalynn Vasquez, and Matthew Brammer for The Kids are alright: Examining how US public relations students ethically navigate artificial intelligence (11-1)
- The newly established **Pamela Bourland-Davis Editorial Excellence Award** honors an individual on staff with JPRE who has demonstrated exceptional commitment, skill, and integrity in editorial leadership. This award goes to: Christopher McCollough, Kennesaw State University, for his diplomacy, leadership, and commitment to PR pedagogical advancement through mentorship.

Special thanks to our sponsors for providing funding for our cash awards to the winners. It is deeply appreciated.

As you read this issue, consider how these insights might inform your teaching, research, or practice. Let us continue to foster environments where students not only acquire the skills they need but also develop the critical awareness and ethical grounding to lead in a rapidly changing world, as Pam would have wanted.

Adrienne A. Wallace
Editor-in-Chief

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 9

In Memoriam: Dr. Pamela Bourland-Davis

The public relations academic community mourns the loss of Dr. Pamela Bourland-Davis, whose passing leaves a profound void in our professional and personal circles. A dedicated educator, visionary leader, and compassionate mentor, Dr. Bourland-Davis exemplified the very best of what it means to serve the academy.

For nearly two decades, she chaired the Department of Communication at Georgia Southern University, where her leadership was marked by a rare blend of intellectual rigor and steadfast support for faculty and students. Her administrative acumen was matched only by her generosity of spirit, guiding, uplifting, and inspiring those around her.

Nationally, Dr. Bourland-Davis's contributions were wide-reaching. She served as Editor of the *Journal of Public Relations Education* and held leadership roles in numerous professional associations, including as Head of the AEJMC Public Relations Division (2000–2001) and as President of the Southern States Communication Association (2020). Her enduring commitment to advancing the discipline was evident in her work with the Commission on Public Relations Education, where she had recently begun serving as Vice Chair.

What set Dr. Bourland-Davis apart was her ability to build community. She mentored emerging scholars with care and conviction, encouraged collaboration, and gently urged others into leadership—often before they recognized their own readiness. Her influence lives on in the many colleagues, students, and friends she empowered.

Dr. Bourland-Davis's legacy is one of inclusion, service, and scholarly excellence. In honoring her memory, we are reminded of the power of mentorship, the importance of humility in leadership, and the enduring impact of a life lived in service to others.

We extend our deepest condolences to her family, friends, and the extended academic community she shaped so meaningfully.

With appreciation and respect,
The Journal of Public Relations Education Editorial Team

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 10-12

The JPRE Awards 2025

Chuck Lubbers Award for Pedagogical Research

The J*ournal of Public Relations Education*'s (JPRE) founding Editor-In-Chief presents the Chuck Lubbers Award for Pedagogical Research. This is an esteemed recognition given annually to an outstanding research paper that exemplifies academic excellence in the field of public relations (PR) education. This award celebrates the innovative, impactful, and methodologically rigorous work of authors who significantly contribute to advancing PR pedagogical understanding and practice. Selected by a panel of expert scholars, the winning paper is distinguished by its originality, research depth, presentation clarity, and potential to influence PR educational theory and practice. This accolade not only honors the authors' dedication to high-quality PR pedagogy research but also sets a benchmark for future submissions, inspiring a continual elevation of standards in PR educational scholarship. The award underscores JPRE's commitment to fostering cutting-edge, transformative educational research. The award is given annually at the AEJMC conference and includes a $250 cash award.

2025 Award Recipients- **Stephanie Madden & Kate Guastaferro** for "Public Relations isn't all Rainbows and Butterflies": Student Experiences in Developing a Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Campaign (10-2)

The Stan Richards School of Advertising & Public Relations – Moody College, UT Top Quality Reviewer Award

The Stan Richards School of Advertising & Public Relations – Moody College, UT Top Quality Reviewer Award for the Journal of Public Relations Education (JPRE) is a prestigious accolade bestowed annually to honor an outstanding individual who has demonstrated exceptional commitment, expertise, and diligence in reviewing JPRE submissions.

This award recognizes the crucial role of peer reviewers in maintaining the highest standards of scholarly discourse and integrity in PR educational research. Recipients are selected based on their thoroughness, constructive feedback, and timely contribution to the advancement of PR pedagogical knowledge. The award acknowledges their invaluable service to the academic community and encourages continued excellence in the critical task of peer review, thus highlighting the vital importance of quality reviews in shaping the future of pedagogical scholarship. The award is given annually at the AEJMC conference and includes a $250 cash award.

2025 Award Recipient - **Katie Place**, Quinnipiac University

Top Ethics in PR Pedagogy Paper Award

The Top Ethics in PR Pedagogy Paper Award for the Journal of Public Relations Education (JPRE) is presented by the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication. This award is a distinguished honor given annually to one exemplary paper in the field of ethics in public relations pedagogy. This award recognizes groundbreaking research that significantly contributes to the understanding and teaching of ethics and responsibility in public communication. The winning paper is chosen from all work published in the journal in a calendar year and will be awarded to a paper that offers exceptional insight, rigorous analysis, and profound impact on the ethics of public relations education. The award reflects the Page Center's dedication to nurturing ethical awareness and practice in corporate and public communication spheres. This accolade not only celebrates academic excellence but also reinforces the importance of integrating ethical considerations into the core of PR education. The award is given annually at the AEJMC conference and includes a $500 cash award. The award will only be given if an appropriate article appears within a calendar year.

2025 Award Recipients - **Alec Tefertiller, Rosalynn Vasquez, Matthew Brammer** for The Kids are Alright: Examining how US Public Relations Students Ethically Navigate Artificial Intelligence (11-1)

Pamela Bourland-Davis Editorial Excellence Award

The Pamela Bourland-Davis Editorial Excellence Award honors an individual on "staff" with JPRE who has demonstrated exceptional commitment, skill, and integrity in editorial leadership. This annual award recognizes those who uphold the highest standards of quality, accuracy, and innovation in the editorial process. Recipients of this award have significantly contributed to elevating the visibility, rigor, and impact of the publications or platforms they steward. Their work reflects a deep dedication to editorial ethics, inclusivity, mentorship, and the advancement of knowledge within their field. This award celebrates excellence in areas such as peer review coordination, editorial strategy, author development, content curation, and process improvement. It acknowledges the often-unseen VOLUNTEER labor of editorial work at JPRE that ensures clarity, coherence, and credibility in published communication. This award winner is selected annually by the Editor-in-Chief, JPRE.

2025 Award Recipient - **Christopher McCollough**, Kennesaw State University

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 13-45

Mandate of Professionalization: Serial Interns, Self-Branding and Invisible Laborers in the PR and Media Industries

Joseph Giomboni, Susquehanna University

ABSTRACT

This study examines how public relations education programs can better prepare students to navigate the evolving dynamics of internship experiences and professional development. Through interviews with 28 PR students and recent graduates, the research reveals a critical gap between academic preparation and industry expectations regarding internship outcomes. The findings suggest PR students prioritize organizational prestige over skill development, potentially undermining educational objectives. Students reported feeling pressure to complete multiple internships to meet perceived industry requirements, even when lacking substantive work experience. The study provides recommendations for PR educators to help students balance brand-driven motivations with meaningful skill development, including implementing structured mentoring programs and incorporating personal branding instruction into PR curricula. These insights can help educators better align internship programs with both student career aspirations and pedagogical goals.

Keywords: public relations education, internship pedagogy, professional development, student mentoring, PR curriculum development

Editorial Record: Submitted September 28, 2024. Revised January 28, 2025. Accepted May 5, 2025.

This study addresses a gap in public relations (PR) and media industries research by examining the experiences of early career laborers seeking credibility and professional experience. Through analysis of student experiences, this research explores the practices and factors that influence contemporary PR and media industries internships and identifies potential barriers to student professional development. To examine students' lived experience, in-depth interviews will shed light on the internal logics of professional development programs and skills deemed essential by public relations management and career gurus. This study includes participants from various communication fields to reflect modern PR education and practice. As this reflects the reality of modern PR education and practice.

As Bernhard and Russman (2024) demonstrate in their analysis of job postings, the boundaries between PR, journalism, and marketing are increasingly blurred due to digitization and evolving skill requirements. This study provides empirical evidence for how students internalize and operationalize self-branding concepts during internships, particularly the finding that students value brand recognition over skill development. This insight allows educators to better align curriculum with student experiences and industry expectations. In addition, while the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and other industry associations offer mentoring programs, this study's findings suggest the need for a more structured, curriculum-integrated mentoring to help students negotiate professionalization mandates, particularly at small liberal arts colleges that may lack chapter affiliations. Access to professional networks, including industry alums, may help address systemic issues in PR internships to better serve students regardless of their college size or PRSSA status. The following study outlines PR education-specific contributions, including documenting how PR students navigate multiple internships, revealing the tension between academic

preparation and industry expectations for PR roles, as well as how students leverage organizational brands to position themselves for industry success.

Self-branding ideology is a neoliberal construct that compels individuals to market themselves as commodities, strategically crafting and promoting their professional identity through various platforms and experiences to enhance their perceived value in the labor market. The participants of this study adopted the neoliberal ideology of individualism and meritocracy, a market-driven belief system that attributes success or failure solely to individual effort and talent while dismissing systemic barriers. Therefore, these individuals place the burden of professional advancement entirely on themselves rather than acknowledging structural inequalities. These neoliberal ideologies manifest in specific labor practices that warrant theoretical examination through the lens of invisible labor.

Situated in the context of political economy of labor, invisible labor focuses on mandated, job-specific tasks and its intrinsic and external rewards that typically benefit employers over individuals. Invisible labor scholarship examines who is obscured and what tasks are categorized as work, rather than leisure or strictly conducted for pleasure. This research has implications for the labor process, including the rise of precarious work arrangements, particularly through value-generating corporate brands (Poster et al., 2016). As invisible labor has been linked to self-branding ideology, Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova (2012) note that compulsive managers of the creative self-brand subscribe to neoliberal ideology of individualism and meritocracy. Educational institutions play a crucial role in perpetuating these labor market dynamics through their internship programs and career development practices.

To highlight college and universities contribution to precarious labor conditions, Discenna (2016) analyzed how organizations employ internship posting texts to naturalize unpaid labor as a social practice that

reaffirms the idea of employability and tenants of career management. Essentially, workers must continuously update skills with market trends. The burden falls on the employee who must accept forms of unpaid labor like internships to secure a full-time position. Neoliberalism values competition among people and rewards merit, while ignoring economic and structural inequalities, as individuals internalize this ideology and take personal responsibility for any potential failures of their circumstances; the individual's self-concept is embedded in neoliberal market relations. Building on these theoretical foundations of neoliberal labor practices and self-branding imperatives, this study examines how these dynamics manifest in PR and media internships.

This study begins with a review of the literature of invisible labor theory and an analysis of self-branding scholarship. Following the methodology, I'll explore themes that emerged from the data that address the aspects of PR and media internships that remain invisible. Turning to the lived experience of interns as sites of research, we can see how these early career workers internalize and reproduce self-branding ideology. This study is significant because these self-branding mantras serve as referents for an individual's investment in a career ideal and serve as a positive intervention to improve internship programs for students embarking on PR and media industries career paths. Therefore, researchers, educators, and practitioners can gain a better understanding of how these individuals prepare for PR and media careers, as well as the motivating factors for selecting internship sites.

In addition to learning skills and developing a portfolio, I argue early career workers conduct invisible labor to enhance their personal brands and employability. The findings suggest PR and media interns and recent graduates internalize the neoliberal imperative of professional legitimacy, compelled to become serial interns to meet industry expectations, even if work experience is limited. The findings suggest that

while PR and media interns gain skills, build their portfolio, and value fair compensation, participants seek internships for professional legitimacy and reputational benefits. Specifically, these individuals primarily pursued internships to have their skills validated by their peers and industry professionals, as well as exploit the prestige and brand recognition of their internship placements through strategic promotion on their resumes and social media platforms. Interviewees comport themselves to a set of ideological conditions, particularly the market-driven mandate of professional credentialing, that may influence how early career workers labor in a professional context to enhance their personal brands and employability.

Self-Branding and Invisible Labor Strategies to Earn Authenticity

Taking an interdisciplinary approach (critical sociology and legal studies) to answer fundamental questions about what constitutes work, Poster et al., (2016) conceptualize the concept of invisible labor within paid employment relationships, including internships. They define invisible labor as activities "workers perform in response to requirements (either implicit or explicit) from employers and that are crucial for workers to generate income, to obtain or retain their jobs, and to further their careers, yet are often overlooked, ignored, and/or devalued by employers, consumers, workers, and ultimately the legal system itself" (Poster et al., 2016, p. 6). While unpaid labor specifically refers to work without monetary compensation, invisible labor encompasses both paid and unpaid activities that are crucial for career advancement yet often go unrecognized, such as networking outside office hours, learning new software independently, or managing one's professional social media presence. This study examines how PR and media interns perform invisible labor through activities that extend beyond their formal internship duties – whether paid or unpaid – including pre-internship preparation, personal brand management, and post-internship relationship maintenance with industry contacts.

Internships converge at the intersection of work and leisure as students perform aesthetic labor to conform to a corporate image; emotional labor to manage emotions (positive attitudes, eager to learn); and negotiate the tension between personal and professional identity to comply with organizational (Hatton, 2017). These "types of labour may be implicitly or explicitly required by employers yet, either way, they are invisible because the goal of such labour is to make their products appear natural, rather than manufactured through individual effort" (Hatton, 2017, p. 340). Lastly, interns perform work that is devalued through spatial dynamics.

This work is not conducted within the institutional context of internship sites. Hatton (2017) outlines "casual digital labor" as a prime example of labor rendered invisible because it typically involves unpaid online activities that can be performed anywhere (p. 344). Some of this study's participants performed work outside the institutional context, originating with the application process, campus networking events, and informal interviews with alumni.

Crain (2016) highlights the consumption habits of persons not categorized as employees, often labelled as volunteers, interns, or student workers. Crain makes the compelling argument that firms substitute brand prestige, industry access, exposure to the field, and networking opportunities in lieu of compensation. Thus, this study's participants collaborate and seek endorsement from colleagues to promote their reputations on social media platforms. As these individuals gain professional connections, this network serves as third-party endorsements, which garners industry trust and credibility for their creative skillsets. Aspects of invisible labor are inherent in a variety of communication disciplines. Based on this literature of the invisible labor of work, this study seeks to investigate the following research question:

RQ1: How do PR and media industry interns perform invisible labor through professionalization and self-branding activities before, during, and after their internships?

Professional Development: Experience and Expectations

Research on student motivations for pursuing internships reveals a complex interplay between professionalization goals, networking aspirations, and the desire for hands-on experience. Daugherty (2011) found PR interns prioritize immediate rewards such as skill acquisition, professional experience, and industry exposure over long-term career benefits. These findings suggest that while organizational prestige matters, interns also seek tangible professional development opportunities during their placements. Research on generational dynamics in PR agencies reveals persistent tensions around professional development and supervision. Gallicano et al. (2012) found that Millennial PR practitioners often feel undervalued by management and struggle with supervisory relationships, despite their eagerness to showcase skills and contribute meaningful content to their organizations. To address these generational tensions, Todd (2014) examined how educational institutions can better prepare Millennial practitioners for industry expectations. This study revealed a significant perception gap: senior executives consistently rated Millennials' entry-level job skills lower than employees' self-assessments. Todd (2014) recommends that educators bridge this gap by facilitating professional development through PRSA meetings, advisory board service, and targeted writing workshops, while employers should focus on supporting early career workers as they navigate interoffice relationships and networking. Building on these findings about professional preparation, Knight and Sweetser (2021) further document this competency perception gap, finding PR practitioners – especially individuals in entry-level positions – consistently overestimate their managerial abilities while organizational leadership reports concern about their technical knowledge.

These technical expectations are substantial: Paskin (2013) argues that PR professionals expect entry-level practitioners to possess not only strong writing and strategic communication abilities, but also demonstrate proficiency with emerging technologies, including social media platforms and graphic design. These persistent misalignments between practitioner self-assessment and industry expectations are further complicated by shifting labor practices, as illuminated in Giomboni's (2025) analysis of industry trade publications.

Through examination of *PRNews*, Giomboni (2025) identifies how industry discourse shifted from emphasizing paid entry-level positions with internal training to promoting unpaid internships with administrative tasks. This shift creates workplace tensions, potentially impeding early career practitioners' pursuit of creative autonomy and professional development. While these professional development expectations shape entry-level requirements, they intersect with broader changes in how early career workers present themselves professionally.

Self-Branding and Social Networking

Coté and Pybus (2007) argue that the affective dimension of users' social networks is a new way youth learn to labor, and the most fundamental task to be successful is personal brand management. Hearn (2008) contends that self-branding should be understood as labor as individuals produce a public persona with the primary goal of attracting attention to acquire monetary value and cultural status. This well-crafted image persuades employers and may raise one's profile within the PR and media industries, but the trade-off is that individuals become an object to be exploited, or, at the very least, a resource for the corporate extraction of value.

Smith (2010) notes several activities for individuals to enhance employability: build human capital (gain skills and industry knowledge), develop social connections (network to land jobs or learn about opportunities for upward mobility), and seek experience by laboring in

unpaid roles, hoping to be hired into paid positions. To be a brand worthy of remark has sparked scholars' attention on professional identity and labor (Burgess & Green, 2009; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Morris, 2014). This insight illustrates how the pivotal role self-branding ideology can play in students' self-constructed professional identity formations during their initial career transition. While the production of creative artifacts helps build student laborers' portfolios to earn access into the PR and media industries, individual pathways to careers typically require professional experience, especially by completing internships.

Social media workers were self-taught to differentiate their skillset from colleagues in the hope their invested labor would benefit their future career aspirations (Bridgen, 2011). As new media responsibilities invaded nights and weekends, participants reasoned the tasks were a necessary part of their jobs that improved self-esteem for contributing good work and enhanced their personal brand with social media expertise. In terms of public relations, the process of professionalization has evolved to focus on practitioner role, including public behavior, and development of specialized education programs and professional standards. As Bernhard and Russman (2024) noted in their analysis of job postings, the boundaries between journalism, public relations, and marketing are converging, particularly because of digitization and changing skill requirements within the communication professions.

In sum, the employee's commitment to develop new skills corresponded with personal branding discourses. These practitioners' legitimized being used as a commodity as an investment in their individual career goals. This career strategy benefits the employer and has the potential for practitioners to be exploited, yet these individuals found value in producing content on social media platforms. Developing a personal brand while gaining professional status is one of the foundational elements of Web 2.0.

Marwick (2013) contends self-branding is presented as an essential Web 2.0 strategy, whereby status is achieved through an individual's accomplishments. And as such, this entrepreneurial strategy of individuals becoming brand does not strictly rely on emerging social media platforms. While scholarship has primarily focused on participants transitioning to emerging platforms as working professionals, self-branding as a part of one's professional identity typically begins on university campuses. Universities across the country include information for students to develop a personal brand online by visiting their Career Center websites.

For example, Kansas State University Career Center (n.d.) page notes: "Today, it is increasingly important to share who you are and what you have to offer an employer, to create a "brand" for yourself. You are the product you are marketing to a potential buyer (the employer)." These career resources feature links to articles on best practices and examples of personal branding for students to emulate, including crafting an "authentic" LinkedIn profile with consistent content, optimizing keywords for search engine optimization, and networking activities like seeking recommendations from former internship supervisors.

Arvidsson et al. (2016) explored self-branding as a form of invisible labor. Accordingly, skilled professionals invest in their reputations to become marketable assets. However, "The labor of self-branding is also invisible in the sense that this practice is rarely discussed or shared; it is simply something that one does as a matter of course, much like brushing one's teeth or working out at the gym" (Arvidsson et al., 2016, p. 240). Gandini (2016) examined social media usage for self-branding purposes among freelance knowledge workers in London and Milan. She found self-branding is a process of "digital work" conducted as an investment in social relationships with an expected return of improving one's reputation and instrumental to secure employment in the precarious digital economy (Gandini, 2016).

LeBlanc (2018) argues personal branding centers on influencing

opinions of classmates, professors, and future employers. In addition to social media influencers and entrepreneurs touting the benefits of branding to college students, scholars have linked personal branding to neoliberal discourses implemented by knowledge workers in the digital economy. Vallas and Hill (2018) interviewed college-educated white-collar workers to examine perceptions of personal branding discourses and its impact on workers' subjectivity. Among the career advice literature, "personal branding can be seen as an especially pure expression of neoliberal economic discourse" (Vallas & Hill, 2018, p. 288). In addition to amateur creative production, self-branding discourses encourage early career laborers to strategize to promote their skills to gain access and experience in the PR and media industries. Self-branding strategies also play a pivotal role in reputation management and building networks to enhance social capital.

This scholarship is situated around the core self-branding themes of emancipation from creativity-stifling bureaucratic structures in favor of flexible work; abandoning unfulfilling routine jobs in pursuit of self-realization by passionately embracing an authentic, entrepreneurial identity toward their career and personal lives; and the marketization of one's identity to obtain individual goals by deploying branding tactics utilized by celebrities and organizations. To investigate how these self-branding imperatives shape the experiences of early career workers in the PR and media industries, this study poses the following research question: RQ2: In what ways do early career workers internalize and reproduce self-branding ideology?

Method: The Lived Experience of Early Career Laborers

To analyze interning within the PR and media industries, in-depth interviews with college students illuminated how these participants positioned themselves to improve employment prospects. This research answers Jacobson and Shade's (2018) call for research to better understand

the motivations and perceptions of unpaid interns in the creative sector. It builds off the findings of Giomboni (2024), based on qualitative interviews with college interns and recent graduates, which contends college students may shed their status as interns and earn creative autonomy through an understanding of the implicit and explicit expectations at the work site. To assess the invisible labor practices and self-branding strategies of college students, 28 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with current students or recent college graduates until responses reached the saturation point – the stage in data collection when additional interviews no longer yielded new themes or insights (Brennen, 2013).

Similar studies analyzing internships conducted qualitative interviews, including Ashton (2015) interviews and focus groups of 54 film and TV entry-level workers in the United Kingdom; Dailey's (2016) research rooted in 87 semi-structured interviews with college interns and full-time employees to explore perceptions of anticipatory socialization; and, Frenette's (2013) interviews with 53 interns and employees to illustrate practices in the commercial New York City music industry. The 28 participants completed between one and four internships each, with an average of three internships per student during their academic career (Appendix A). Beebe and colleagues (2009) studied communication students' college experiences and found participants averaged 1.15 internships.

This study draws on interviewing research techniques outlined by Fontana and Frey (1998) regarding locating informants, establishing rapport with respondents, and collecting empirical materials. Interviewees were recruited via snowball sampling techniques to internship coordinators at several universities. Following Institutional Review Board approval, all participants completed informed consent forms that outlined the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as research subjects, including confidentiality and the option to withdraw from the study at any

time. In total, 28 interns from 12 colleges, ranging from regional liberal arts to urban research centers located in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, agreed to participate. All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. In addition, names of each participant's internship site and university have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

I requested interviewees withhold any identifying information to ensure participant confidentiality as a paid transcription service transcribed interview data. All interviews were transcribed by Kelsey Transcripts, which resulted in over 570 single-spaced transcribed pages. Interviews were conducted by telephone or in-person from June through August 2018. Each interview lasted between 30 and 120 minutes. The average length of each interview was approximately 45 minutes.

This study featured interviews with interns who were participating or recently completed internships for academic credit at colleges and universities in a U.S. context to consider the range of positions and professional development within the culture industries. While the Commission of Public Relations Education (2023) noted the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the culture industries to shift to remote or hybrid work models, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the impact of the pandemic or compare intern experiences pre-and-post pandemic. Participants described tasks essential to their internships, including media relations, research, public affairs, social media, and community relations. Participants primarily worked in higher education, health care, public relations agencies, start-up tech firms, and nonprofit partners.

By examining these individuals' internship experiences, I identified categories that highlight processes shared by college interns in terms of invisible labor, networking, and professional development. These categorical themes overlap and interconnect to provide a foundational understanding of these individual's creative environments. Interviews explored how universities prepare students for work, highlighting the

tension between ideology and students' lived experience to shed light on these interns' cognizant awareness of inequitable working conditions (anticipated and experienced), as well as practices of resistance.

Invisible Laborers Bolster Networks & Role Clarity

A primary research question of this study posited: How do PR and media industry interns perform invisible labor through professionalization and self-branding activities before, during, and after their internships? In-depth interviews shed light on the different ways these individuals internalize discourses surrounding intern work. In addition to learning skills and developing a portfolio, I argue PR and media interns and recent graduates were not necessarily concerned with compensation, but rather seek internships in the hope to have their skills validated by their peers and industry professionals, as well as exploit the prestige and brand recognition of their internship placements through strategic promotion. As a recent college graduate with a bachelor's degree in journalism and media studies, Marie completed four internships and learned about corporate hierarchies at network news stations. She competed against an estimated pool of tens of thousands of applicants for a major news network internship.

Marie claims having the brand on her resume bolstered her application in an inundated labor market: "I noticed that last semester after I had (national TV station) on my resume, I had gotten a lot more calls back from departments that I had never gotten calls back from before. In addition to working as a producer for her on-campus radio station, Marie interned for two organizations before earning a third internship at a major network-affiliate. This visible representation of a brand on her resume validated her as a candidate for a future network television internship position. She networked with upperclassmen to secure references for internship sites.

Marie scanned social media to gauge her competition for future employment. After learning about her classmate's successful internships,

Marie attempted to pursue a similar career path to remain competitive on the job market. Social media posts helped Marie understand the value of internship experience with industry-recognized organizations.

At the internship site, a context where an intern's status can be diminished with the label of "intern," participants valued visible representations of their professionalism. During Marie's internships, she learned more than surface-level acumen about professional titles. She gained industry knowledge through observation, learning about the role and responsibilities of laborers within the PR and media industries. A critical benefit of this experience was establishing industry connections. Participants relied on networking strategies, particularly on social media channels, to maintain relationships with industry professionals to bridge the months to year(s)-long gap from coursework to full-time employment.

Scarlett completed four internships and a fellowship prior to earning a bachelor's degree in journalism. During orientation for the news department of a national radio station, Scarlett learned about corporate policies concerning discrimination and sexual harassment. It is important to note that interns who do not participate in orientation sessions may not be given a basic understanding of their fundamental rights to a safe work environment. By conducting the invisible labor of shadowing journalists during her first day at the radio station.

In addition, participants noted they lacked knowledge of technical equipment or software at the work site. To overcome this obstacle, these individuals demonstrated resilience by conducting invisible labor to learning new technology via watching YouTube tutorials at the worksite. This enabled them to complete assignments and build their professional portfolio. Moreover, participants did not participate in internship to learn skills and develop a portfolio. They strategically applied to internship sites to earn a brand on their resumes.

As an emerging senior with student PR agency experience among her credentials, Sara completed internships four consecutive semesters

to earn a position with a media conglomerate. Sara viewed internships at prestigious organizations as a critical credential that transcended actual skills development, reflecting a broader pattern where participants leveraged organizational reputation to enhance their personal brand and marketability. In terms of peer recognition, Sara added: "Everyone knows [conglomerate] like it's just a brand and a big, big name that everyone knows whether you love it or hate it… getting an internship at one of these big companies just to get my foot in the door further than anybody else who hasn't for a full-time job." Jared had a similar experience when he completed an internship during the summer of his junior year with an advertising agency in New York. He selected the site, not based on the internship job description, but to list the brand on his resume: "The number one thing I wanted out of the internship was just a good first experience at an advertising agency. I didn't really care what it entailed. I just wanted like a good name and a good experience."

Jared pointed out during the interview that a "good experience" was to observe an advertising agency's corporate culture and complete basic tasks. Lily completed three video editing internships at media conglomerates in New York: "I wasn't really looking too much outside of [conglomerates] because I knew those are really highly coveted and would look great on my resume." Lily evaluated internships based on perception rather than the actual skills learned at the work site. Interviewees circumvented an unexpected employment obstacle: class standing.

By the end of her junior year, Isabelle completed four internships including three in public affairs positions with government agencies. As an emerging senior, she rejected employment offers because of her class standing. She was in a proverbial "waiting game" to transition to an entry-level position and conducted invisible labor of self-branding to remain professionally visible to former contacts earned at prior internship sites.

Similarly, Lily completed two video editor internships at national television networks and had to pass on a job offer due to her undergraduate

status. During her cable entertainment video editing internship, a full-time position opened at the network, but she was not able to pursue the entry-level production assistant position because she had to complete the spring semester of her senior year to earn her bachelor's degree. To bridge the gap from college senior to emerging video editing professional, Lily maintained connections with former site supervisors and coworkers at both network stations to provide recommendations; she later landed her first professional job at a former internship site. Participants sought internships to create their network and validate professional skillsets.

Pearl viewed her nonprofit internship as an opportunity to network and gain references. While gaining experience with on-campus media, including the PR agency, Pearl sought an internship to validate her professional skills. In addition, Kathryn was a mass communication major and paid intern who answered phones for the midnight shift at the assignment desk and sorted mail for a TV network. This staffing arrangement raises ethical concerns, as the organization appeared to substitute an intern for what was previously a full-time compensated position. However, menial administrative tasks that scholars have cited as an example of exploitative intern labor was viewed as an opportunity by Kathryn to network, which led to a recommendation to secure full-time employment.

In sum, these participants benefited from internships and demonstrated resilience by conducting invisible labor via social networking sites to sustain professional relationships with site supervisors and industry contacts who later provided recommendations to help secure future employment. By obtaining prestigious internships, interviewees improved their future career prospects significantly as their resumes included brand-name experience that helped bypass resume sorting software and short-listed them as candidates for other prestigious internship experiences.

Mandate of Professionalization

This study seeks to understand the ways early career workers internalize and reproduce self-branding ideology. I contend PR and media interns and recent graduates internalize the neoliberal professionalization imperative, compelled to become serial interns to meet industry expectations, even if work experience is limited. Interviewees comport themselves to a set of ideological conditions, particularly the neoliberal imperative of professional legitimacy, that may influence how early career workers labor in a professional context to enhance their personal brands and employability.

Gabrielle selected the unpaid internship site because of the organizational prestige of a PR internship with a minor league sports team. Gabrielle, a junior mass communication major with a marketing minor, said she "thought like it would be a cool opportunity to put on my resume, to say that I worked with, you know, like a affiliate with the [major league sports team] someday." Lured by the reputation of a subsidiary of a professional sports team, Gabrielle did not apply with the intention of obtaining a full-time position. Gabrielle was motivated to intern because of the perceived value the organization's reputation added to her resume, and, in turn, her personal brand, while gaining experience in her field of study. Interviewees also comported themselves to a set of ideological conditions, particularly the PR and media industries market-driven mandate of professional credentialing, that may influence early career workers to labor in a professional context to enhance their personal brands and employability.

The data revealed participants pursued multiple paths toward employment in response to the neoliberal professionalization imperative. The findings showed that students initially sought to diversify their professional portfolio through coursework and campus media experience, with most participants reporting involvement in student newspapers,

television stations, or student-run public relations agencies.. However, interview data consistently indicated that participants discovered industry recognition of their professional competence, rather than campus experience alone, was critical to employment prospects.

Kiera began developing her journalism skills at her university's student newspaper and magazine. Kiera explained her rationale for completing multiple internships prior to her senior year as a necessary step to earn employment in the contemporary media landscape:

> It used to be like college was the thing you had to work your ass off for and like get your resume. Now it's like also internships, like you can't -- it's like the job market everyone talks about but now it's like "the intern" -- it's a very competitive thing more than it ever has been before.

Kiera compares the need to distinguish oneself prior to applying for college admission with an emerging reality many college students experience with internships and the job market: to secure full-time employment, prospective workers must earn industry credentials through internships to gain access to the PR and media industries. Without the requisite industry experience as a student, access to more prestigious internship positions were unavailable. Kiera internalized professionalization mandates and developed a strategy to meet those industry expectations. Other participants pursued internships as a prerequisite many employers look for on an applicant's resume: industry experience.

As part of the market-driven mandate of professional legitimacy, students are required to have practical experience before securing entry-level positions. A recent journalism graduate with a minor in public relations, Hanna transitioned to TV and benefited from an opportunity to observe the daily proceedings of a working newsroom. Hanna capitalized on her internship's structured orientation program, matching names to job function and responsibilities, and evaluating the professional

workflow. Most participants transitioned from shadowing reporters to content production within one week. She completed two full-time unpaid prominent TV station internships during the summer, while working part-time jobs to supplement her income. Scholars would blanch at the notion of a student resigned to participate in three consecutive unpaid internships, yet Hanna clearly benefited beyond the category of compensation, developing her reel, industry contacts, and employment offers.

Barbara completed five internships and earned her bachelor's degree in media studies and production, including her first the summer following freshman year with her hometown TV station, and concluding with a national TV station in Washington, D.C. Barbara invested two years of work at the college station and completed one internship to earn recognition from management of her abilities. More importantly, Barbara's prior experience prepared her to immediately contribute "hands-on" professional work at network internship sites, which deviated from management's prior conceptions of an intern's capabilities. These participants understood the value of their work and status recognition as self-branding strategies. Early career laborers capitalized on prior entry-level internship experience to build a competitive resume that provided access to more prestigious firms and soon had their abilities validated by industry professionals. Participants who completed prestigious internships typically secured their first industry job prior to attending commencement.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the ways early career workers conducted invisible labor to enhance their personal brands and employability. This serves to answer the first research question of this study, which considers the invisible aspects of labor through professionalization and self-branding activities associated with PR and media industries internships. Interviewees benefited from their invisible labor in the PR and media industries, ranging from basic observation or shadowing of professionals at the work site, networking to earn references, and developing technical and software skills.

The pursuit of organizational prestige emerged as a dominant theme, with participants prioritizing internships at recognized brands over potentially more substantive learning experiences at lesser-known organizations. This strategic emphasis on organizational reputation reveals how deeply self-branding ideology influences intern decision-making. While this focus on prestigious organizations shapes initial internship selection, it often leads to a pattern of seeking multiple internships to build an increasingly impressive resume.

However, the findings suggest PR and media interns and recent graduates are compelled to become serial interns to meet industry expectations, even if work experience is limited. Self-branding mantras and professionalization mandates create the dominant culture's ideology that argues internships are critical for future success, particularly that an internship will build a portfolio that bolsters students' competitive edge on the job market. Staying late, working hard, not performing administrative tasks, proving yourself to be indispensable are among the neoliberal directives. However, interns do benefit from participating in the system and have the capacity to respond within the professional context.

Students earned a formal offer for full-time employment at the conclusion of their internship but could not accept because of their class standing; Barbara was a sophomore when she rejected an assistant news director position with a network-affiliated television station. Or, in Marie's case, she rejected future employment because of a toxic work environment. While waiting to graduate, participants were in "employment limbo," relying on network connections to secure additional internships and thus resorting to become serial interns.

Interns like Gabrielle were motivated by the employer's organizational prestige rather than the actual internship experience. Participants in this study deliberately sought organizations with industry reputations, such as media conglomerates, TV networks, or professional sports teams. The brand became a source of their employability and

validation of professional skillsets, regardless of the fact the internship was disappointing or lacked "hands-on" tasks. Rather than focusing on skill development or the role and responsibilities, these participants valued the credential. This rationale is rooted in self-branding ideology and neoliberal marketability as the opportunity to list a brand on their resume superseded the actual experience. Interns are trained and recruited into professional settings, yet the onus for success is shifted from social structures to individual ambition. Participants adopted neoliberal values that endorse individual choices to dictate future outcomes.

Sara granted consent to participate in internships by adopting self-branding ideologies. Arvidsson (2008) termed these primary motivations as "socially recognized self-realization" (p. 332) where participants take pride in their work, but also hope to have their skills recognized by their peers. Sara became a neoliberal subject, confronting the risk of career outcomes, by comporting herself to the ideological conditions of the PR and media industries. Participants like Hanna became an unpaid serial intern seeking professional experience to meet entry-level position requirements. Firms can take advantage of this asymmetrical power relationship by promoting this association: industry experience for privileged access. Interns granted consent to these working conditions and strategically invested in serial internships as some participants witnessed first-hand the viability of this career path from upperclassmen. As such, interviewees would promote prestigious internships on their social media platforms like Snapchat.

The second primary research question I investigated are the ways early career workers internalize and reproduce self-branding ideology. The findings suggest that while PR and media interns and recent graduates value fair compensation, they pursue internships primarily for the professional legitimacy and reputational benefits that prestigious organizations provide when featured on their resumes and social media platforms.

Interviewees comport themselves to a set of ideological conditions, particularly the PR and media industries market-driven mandate of professional legitimacy, that may influence early career workers to labor in a professional context. After completing hours of invisible labor for campus media tasks, these individuals adopted a mentality that it was critical to labor in a professional context to enhance their personal brands and employability. Students have shifted gears from college admission to a frenzied pursuit to pad their resumes with superficial internship experiences to improve their prospects on a competitive job market. Participants were motivated to pursue internships to diversify their professional portfolio, not only from coursework, but creative work produced at the campus newspaper, television station, or student-run public relations agency. Internal student-run media, however, do not lead to full-time employment and do not equate to industry work samples. Participants were strategic; they made autonomous choices with clear motives, including networking, portfolio development, or exposure to their field of study.

This study's findings that emerged from an investigation of self-branding practices contrast with internship statistics that some colleges and universities traditionally use to evaluate internship success, such as the percentage of internships that lead to employment or continued service at a corporation. As a result, university career services and internship coordinators should expand their evaluation metrics beyond traditional measures of job placement and satisfaction to account for how students strategically leverage organizational prestige for professional advancement. In addition, interns partake in vast amounts of invisible labor to research host sites, complete applications, network, interview, and produce "good work" for firms that do not result in the tangible portfolio pieces, blurring the line between ambiguous roles and workplace responsibilities and exploitation of early career laborers.

Among the limits of this study, demographic data including age, gender identity, and ethnicity were not systematically collected from participants, and the sample included interns from various communication disciplines beyond PR, including journalism, advertising, and media studies, suggesting future research should employ more targeted recruitment strategies to ensure comprehensive demographic representation and discipline-specific insights. Participants volunteered through e-mail solicitation from career center directors or communication faculty. Other participants were recruited through snowball sampling. This recruitment method may have introduced selection bias, potentially attracting participants who were more engaged or successful in their internships. Therefore, this data is not generalizable to the entire college student population but is rather illustrative of the kinds of internship experiences of PR and media industry majors. Future research could address these limitations by employing a more diverse sampling strategy or incorporating a mixed methodology by including a survey component to capture a broader range of experiences.

In terms of future scholarship, scholars can explore the countless invisible labor hours conducting research on the PR and media industries to apply for available positions, network with faculty and industry professionals, and secure references at unpaid internships positions to gain paid internships that lead to meaningful work. Understanding discounted forms of labor is important to understand who is valued as a worker and what is valued as work. Scholars can conduct comparative studies to compare experiences of paid versus unpaid interns in the various media industry sectors to illuminate compensation influences internship outcomes.

The findings regarding organizational prestige suggest that internship coordinators and career counselors should help students balance the allure of brand-name internships with opportunities for meaningful skill development at lesser-known organizations. While this study

documents how students strategically pursue serial internships, it does not fully explore how this emphasis on prestigious, often unpaid internships may perpetuate systemic inequalities, particularly for students who may not be able to afford to work without compensation or lack the social capital to access elite opportunities. Future research should examine how the mandate for serial internships affects socioeconomic diversity within PR and media industries, with specific attention to barriers to entry for students from historically marginalized communities.

Addressing invisible labor of interns may shift the conversation from unpaid to paid compensation as a metric of exploitation to a quantifiable investment of one's labor time that benchmarks non-competitive unpaid work through compensated positions. Longitudinal studies tracking the career trajectories of former interns could provide insights into long-term benefits and pitfalls of serial interns. In addition, studies from the employer perspective can examine employer motivations for securing intern labor and their perceptions of early career workers value to provide a holistic overview of the internship ecosystem. Lastly, if students are devalued by their status as intern, the symbolic gesture of providing new interns with a professional identification card may serve as a symbol of professional competence. An experimental study can examine a colleague's perceptions of workers being designated as an intern or entry-level employee.

This study's findings have several practical implications for interns in the PR and media industries, including the suggestion that colleges and universities integrate courses or modules on personal branding, networking, and professional development strategies into the curriculum to explore the realities of the neoliberal "mandate of professionalization." Colleges should address how internship credits are awarded, potentially implementing a tiered system that recognizes the value of multiple internships while becoming good stewards of intern labor by ensuring students are not hindered by this relationship.

Therefore, colleges and industry should implement mentoring programs to pair students with professionals to bridge the gap between academics and industry expectations, as well as develop ethical guidelines for internships that address issues of invisible labor to ensure interns receive meaningful experiences. Neoliberal ideologies mask power relationships between intern and organization as demonstrated by the lived experience of college students. These positions help sustain the structural conditions of the intern economy. The PR and media industries solicit ideal candidates for entry-level work, extending the duration and intensity of serial interns' commitment to potentially unpaid positions. In turn, the PR and media industries contribute to the precarious conditions that reproduce power asymmetries over a surplus of eager early career laborers.

References

Arvidsson, A. (2008). The ethical economy of customer coproduction. *Journal of Macromarketing, 28*(4), 326–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146708326077

Arvidsson, A., Gandini, A., & Bandinelli, C. (2016). Self-branding among freelance knowledge workers. In Crain M., Poster W., & Cherry M. (Eds.), *Invisible labor: hidden work in the contemporary world* (pp. 239-256). University of California Press.

Ashton, D. (2015). Making media workers: Contesting film and television industry career pathways. *Television & New Media, 16*(3), 275-294. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476414532956

Banet-Weiser, S, & Arzumanova, I. (2012). Creative authorship, self-actualizing women, and the self-brand. In C. Chris & D. Gerstner (Eds.), *Media authorship* (pp. 163–179). Routledge.

Beebe, A., Blaylock, A., & Sweetser, K. D. (2009). Job satisfaction in public relations internships. *Public Relations Review, 35*(2), 156-158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.09.016

Bernhard, J., & Russmann, U. (2024). Blurring boundaries: A longitudinal analysis of skills required in journalism, PR, and marketing job ads. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 101*(3), 612-636. https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990231181544

Brennen, B. (2013). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. Routledge.

Bridgen, L. (2011). Emotional labour and the pursuit of the personal brand: Public relations practitioners' use of social media. *Journal of Media Practice, 12*(1), 61-76. https://instituteforpr.org/emotional-labour-and-the-pursuit-of-the-personal-brand-public-relations-practitioners-use-of-social-media/

Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2009). The entrepreneurial vlogger: Participatory culture beyond the professional-amateur divide. In P. Snickars, & P. Vonderau P. (Eds). *The YouTube reader*. (pp. 89–107). Polity Press.

Commission on Public Relations Education (2023, November). Navigating change: Recommendations for advancing undergraduate public relations education. http://www.commissionpred.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CPRE-50th-Anniversary-Report-FInal-Final.pdf

Coté, M., & Pybus, J. (2007). Learning to immaterial labour 2.0: MySpace and social networks. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization, 7*(1), 88-106.

Crain, M. (2016). Consuming work. In Crain M., Poster W., & Cherry M. (Eds.), *Invisible labor: Hidden work in the contemporary world* (pp. 257-278). University of California Press.

Daugherty, E. L. (2011). The public relations internship experience: A comparison of student and site supervisor perspectives. *Public Relations Review, 37*(5), 470-477. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.09.010

Dailey, S. L. (2016). What happens before full-time employment? Internships as a mechanism of anticipatory socialization, Western *Journal of Communication, 80*(4), 453-480. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2016.1159727

Kansas State University (n.d.). *Developing a personal brand online*. https://www.k-state.edu/careercenter/students/apply_interview/branding/personalbrand.html

Discenna, T.A. (2016). The discourses of free labor: Career management, employability, and the unpaid intern. *Western Journal of Communication, 80*(4),435-452. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2016.1162323

Duffy, B.E., & Hund, E. (2015). "Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media+ Society, 1*(2), p. 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604337

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (1998). "Interviewing: The art of the science." In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 47-78). Sage.

Frenette, A. (2013). Making the intern economy: Role and career challenges of the music industry intern. *Work and Occupations, 40*(4), 364-397. https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888413504098

Gallicano, T. D., Curtin, P., & Matthews, K. (2012). I love what I do, but... A relationship management survey of millennial generation public relations agency employees. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 24*(3), 222-242. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2012.671986

Gandini, A. (2016). Digital work: Self-branding and social capital in the freelance knowledge economy. *Marketing Theory, 16*(1), 123-141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593115607942

Giomboni, J. (2024). Early career workers granted creative autonomy: Agency shifts intern debate toward industry expectations. *Journal of Education and Work, 37*(1–4), 292–308.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2024.2335470

Giomboni, J. (2025). A political economy of communication analysis of PR News: Intern status, skills, and conflict within the public relations industry. *Public Relations Inquiry, 14*(1), 49-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X241266963

Hatton, E. (2017). Mechanisms of invisibility: Rethinking the concept of invisible work. *Work, Employment and Society, 31*(2), 336-351. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017016674894

Hearn, A. (2008). Meat, mask, burden: Probing the contours of the branded self. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 8*(2),197-217. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540508090086

Jacobson, J., & Shade, L.R. (2018). Stringtern: springboarding or stringing along young interns' careers? *Journal of Education and Work, 31*(3), 320-337. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1473559

Knight, W.M., & Sweetser, K. D. (2021). Mind the gap: Understanding public relations competence in the eyes of practitioners and the dominant coalition. *Public Relations Review, 47*, 102037. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102037

LeBlanc, K. (2018, March 5). *How students can build their personal brand while in university*. Medium. https://medium.com/the-mission/how-students-can-build-their-personal-brand-while-in-university-50303e21c1e0

Marwick, A. (2013). *Status update: Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*. Yale University Press.

Morris, J. (2014). Artists as entrepreneurs, fans as workers. *Popular Music and Society, 37*(3), 273-290. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.778534

Paskin, D. (2013). Attitudes and perceptions of public relations professionals towards graduating students' skills. *Public Relations Review, 39*, 251-253. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.01.003

Smith, V. (2010). Review article: Enhancing employability: Human, cultural, and social capital in an era of turbulent unpredictability. *Human Relations, 63*(2), 279-300. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709353639

Todd, V. (2014). Public relations supervisors and millennial entry-level practitioners' rate entry-level job skills and professional characteristics. *Public Relations Review, 40*(5), 789-797. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.05.002

Vallas, S.P. & Hill, A.L. (2018). Reconfiguring worker subjectivity: Career advice literature and the "branding" of the worker's self. *Sociological Forum, 33*(2), 287-309. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12418

Appendix A
Important Information

Intern (Pseudonym), Academic year at time of review	Internship(s) Academic Year and Semester	Internship Site	Major/Minors (m)	Campus Activities	Paid/Unpaid
Kathryn Senior	Jr-Spring	TV-News	Mass Comm	TV Station Radio Station	Unpaid
Rita Graduate	So-Summer Jr-Summer Sr-Spring	TV-News Newspaper TV-News	Comm Studies	TV Station Newspaper	Unpaid Unpaid Unpaid
Michael Sophomore	So-Summer	Radio	Journalism & Electronic Media, Theatre (m)	Radio Station Newspaper TV Station	Unpaid
William Graduate	Sr-Fall	Newspaper	Comm Studies	Newspaper TV Station PR Agency	Paid
Constance Junior	So-Spring Jr-Spring Jr-Summer	NFP/Charity Ad Agency Telecom Conglomerate	Advertising	Resident Assistant Admission Ambassador	Unpaid Unpaid Paid
Lukas Junion	Jr-Summer	NFP/Charity	Advertising	None	Unpaid
Yasmine Junion	Fr-Spring So-Fall Jr-Spring Jr-Summer	Publicist Start-up/Blog Digital Mk Agency Adv/PR Agency	PR, Af. Am. History (m)	PR Agency Journalists Club	Unpaid Unpaid Unpaid Paid
Hanna Graduate	Fr-Summer So-Summer Sr-Summer	Sports-PR Sports-PR TV-News	Journalism, PR (m)	TV Station	Unpaid Unpaid Unpaid
Sara Junior	So-Summer Jr-Spring Sr-Summer	Dig Mk/PR Corporate Telecom Conglomerate	Advertising PR (m)	PR Agency	Paid Paid Paid
Keira Junior	Fr-Winter So-Summer Jr-Summer	Magazin Conglomerate Media-Mk-Blog Finance Magazine	Journalism	Newspaper Magazine	Unpaid Unpaid Unpaid
Pearl Graduate	Jr-Spring Jr-Summer	NFP/Charity NFP/Charity	Comm Studies	TV Station Newspaper	Unpaid Paid

Intern (Pseudonym), Academic year at time of review	Internship(s) Academic Year and Semester	Internship Site	Major/Minors (m)	Campus Activities	Paid/Unpaid
Vanessa Junior	So-Summer Jr-Fall Jr-Spring	Radio Station NFP/Charity PR Agency	Broadcast Journalism Theatre (m)	TV Station Newspaper PR	Unpaid Paid Unpaid
Scarlett Junior	Fr-Spring Fr-Summer Jr-Spring Jr-Summer	Radio Station Radio Station Government Radio Station	Journalism	Radio Station Journalists Club	Unpaid Unpaid Paid Paid
Eloise Junior	HS-Junior Fr-Summer Jr-Summer	NFP/Charity Corporate Start-up/Blog	PR Dance	None	Unpaid Paid Unpaid
Marie Graduate	So-Summer Jr-Spring Jr-Summer Sr-Spring	Campus-Events Campus-PR TV-local news TV-network news	Journalism Media Studies History (m) Women's & Gender Studies (m)	TV Station	Unpaid Unpaid Unpaid Paid
Ibrahim Junior	Jr-Fall Jr-Summer	TV-local news TV-network news	Journalism Spanish Political Science (m)	TV Station Radio Station	Paid Paid
Gabrielle Junior	Jr-Fall	Sports-local	Mass Comm Marketing (m)	Newspaper Yearbook	Unpaid
Amira Junioe	Jr-Spring	Sports-local	Comm Studies Athletic Admin Coaching (m) New Media (m)	None	Paid
Barbara Junior	Fr-Summer So-Summer Jr-Fall Jr-Summer	TV-local news TV network news TV-local news TV-network news	Media Studies and Production Political Science (m)	TV Station	Unpaid Paid Paid Paid
Jared Junior	So-Spring Jr-Summer	Corporate Adv Agency	Advertising	Adv Club	Unpaid Unpaid
Tamara Senior	Sr-Summer	Corporate	Strat Comm	PR Club	Paid
Gavin Junior	Jr-Fall Jr-Summer	Corporate Corporate	Strat Comm Political Science	None	Unpaid Paid
Isabelle Junior	Fr-Summer So-Fall So-Summer Jr-Spring	Sales Government Government Government	Political Science Professional Writing (m)	Yearbook	Paid Unpaid Paid Unpaid

Intern (Pseudonym), Academic year at time of review	Internship(s) Academic Year and Semester	Internship Site	Major/Minors (m)	Campus Activities	Paid/Unpaid
Rhonda Graduate	Sr-Spring	Adv Agency	Comm Studies Creative Writing (m)	None	Unpaid
Julie Junior	So-Summer Jr-Summer	Government On-Campus-Web	Communications Computer Science	Newspaper	Paid Paid
Vincent Junior	Fr-Summer So-Summer	Sports/Edu Sports Association	Communications Sports Management	Newspaper Radio Station	Unpaid Unpaid
Lily Graduate	Jr-Fall Jr-Spring Sr-Fall	TV-Cable Ent TV-Cable Ent TV-Cable Ent	Communication Visual Comm Info & Media (m)	TV Station Writing Center	Paid Paid Paid
Nadia Senior	So-Summer So-Summer Jr-Spring	NFP/Charity Start-up/SM Sales	Comm Studies Sign Language (m)	None	Unpaid Unpaid Paid

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 46-68

Teaching Brief/GIFT

Facilitating Students´ Career Readiness Through Social Media Micro-internships with On-Campus Clients

Denisse Vasquez-Guevara, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
Preeti Wadhwa, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

ABSTRACT

Facilitating student career readiness is one of the key goals of baccalaureate communication programs. Specifically, employers seek professionals with technical skills (copywriting, editing, and content creation) and soft skills (critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork). However, first-generation students face disparities in accessing internship opportunities. This GIFT highlights a micro-internship experience offered to students enrolled in the course titled "Online and Social Media." As a part of this course-embedded experience, student teams developed social media strategies and content for on-campus clients. The student learning objectives included (a) creating a social media strategy aligned with the client's goals; (b) developing social media content adapted to varied target audience so as to increase reach and audience engagement; (c) helping students develop critical thinking, negotiation, teamwork; and last, but not the least, (d) exposing students to professional behavior and expectations. The associated assignments, rubric, teaching materials, and students' qualitative self-evaluation results are discussed.

Keywords: social media, micro-internship, soft-skills, public relations, journalism, communication, first-generation students

Editorial Record: Submitted August 12, 2024. Revised December, 2024. Accepted May 5, 2025.

Overview

As a part of this course-embedded micro-internship (MI) experience, students majoring in Multimedia Journalism, Public Relations, and Communication Studies enrolled in an upper-division required course titled "Online & Social Media" to offer real-world consulting to on-campus clients. The class had a total of 25 students between the ages of 20 and 25 years, with 15 juniors and 10 seniors. 90% of the students were first-generation college students. The sample consisted of 68% females and 32% males. In terms of ethnic backgrounds, 56% were Latino/a, 28% identified as White, and 8% each as Asian American and African American.

In teams of 2-4 members, students engaged in providing real-world consulting to three on-campus clients, including the Poly Post (student-run newspaper), the Farm Store (Grocery Store), and the Communication Department at Cal Poly Pomona (CPP). These clients, which included an academic unit, a non-profit business, and a news outlet, exemplified prospective employers for communication professionals. Media outlets use social media platforms to report news. Retail stores utilize social media to share information about their products and related promotions with customers. Educational institutions use social media to connect with current and prospective students, among others, to promote academic programs and events.

The course instructor negotiated partnerships with each site with the dual goal of providing students with a course-relevant experience that mimics the real-world, while addressing clients' problems, a win-win for all. Students chose clients aligned with their majors and interests and worked on developing a social media strategic plan guided by client briefing. Students who completed the MI received a small stipend of 600.00 USD. This stipend was made possible through the MI initiative launched by the Office of Academic Innovation at CPP. This experience

enabled the development of transferable knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) in participating students including professionalism, negotiation, teamwork, critical thinking, effective communication, leadership, and diversity, equity, and inclusion practices (DEI) which are critical for successful college-to-career transition of students (Toth & Bourland-Davis, 2023).

The following section outlines the briefing provided by clients:

The Poly Post

CPP's student-run newspaper since 1940, The Poly Post, provides coverage of the campus and local community news to a student body of more than 28,000 and about 2,400 faculty and staff members. (The Poly Post, 2023). Student journalists report news through a printed newspaper and online weekly editions. Aligned with the university's "learning by doing philosophy, the Poly Post offers a learning lab for students in multimedia journalism (Communication Department, 2024)."

For the MI project, the multimedia journalism students' majors oversaw this client. The newspapers' main goals were to (1) promote reader engagement through Poly Post's social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and their website; and (2) position the media as an independent student-run media by showcasing students' work as reporters and future journalists.

Communication Department, Cal Poly Pomona

CPP's Communication Department, with over 400 students, offers BS degrees in science in Communication Studies, Multimedia Journalism, and Public Relations. The Department is a diverse and vibrant community where students, faculty, and alumni actively engage in scientific research, events, and service-learning projects with non-profit organizations, private companies, and advocacy groups. Moreover, as part of the California State University system (CSU), the Communication Department offers frequent scholarships, professional development events, and networking

opportunities to support students' career readiness. The Communication Department uses Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn as social media platforms to connect with its audiences.

In its briefing goals, the Communication Department emphasized on (1) developing a strategy to acknowledge students' and faculty achievements (i.e., awards, scholarships); and (2) showcasing its events, learning experiences, and unique opportunities to students to support campus-wide recruitment strategies.

This client was assigned to students majoring in public relations and communication studies given their specialization in organizational communication.

The Farm Store, Huntley College of Agriculture

Founded in September 2001, the CPP Farm Store is a grocery store selling fresh produce grown on campus and also by small businesses in Southern California. Its target customers include the campus community and the local community. The Farm Store sells farm-to-table fruits, honey, jams, and vegan food options locally sourced from over 400 acres of farmland across the campus and the greater Pomona in Southern California (The Farm Store, 2020).

CPP's Farm Store primarily uses Facebook and Instagram to promote its products and services. This client's goals for their social media strategy development were to (1) position the Farm Store as a farm-to-table grocery store open to the campus and the broader community at large, and how its sales support polytechnic learning experiences and (2) attract new customers by showcasing trending products.

Public relations majors were assigned to this client, given their focus on developing promotional campaigns for goods and services.

Rationale

This assignment incorporated several directives recommended by the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE). Most of all,

CPRE strongly recommends that educators and practitioners partner to create experiential learning opportunities that enhance students' exposure to workplace behavior and expectations, thereby facilitating their career readiness (Toth & Bourland-Davis, 2023). This assignment strives to achieve precisely that. Further, the CPRE 2023 report reiterated the emphasis placed by the public relations practitioners on the critical strategic thinking skills as the most sought-after skill for entry-level professionals. Consequently, CPRE encourages educators to design capstone experiences that allow students to apply their learning to a real-world problem. This assignment is aligned with the recommendation.

Finally, CPRE encourages educators to explicitly embed DEI as a part of the ethical social responsibility in the curriculum design (Toth & Bourland-Davis, 2023). When incorporating client-specific key performance indicators (KPIs), the project guidelines emphasized developing inclusive strategic communication for target audiences representing a diverse population. Precisely, emphasis was placed on respectfully representing audiences' culture and identity when developing social media strategies.

To provide a learning experience that simulates the job market, students applied for the micro-intern position through Parker Dewey's online portal designed specifically for CPP students. This process required students to write a cover letter emphasizing how they would contribute to the client's goals. The MI experience embedded in the course required six weeks of in-class training before completing 40 hours of work per student. The experience culminated with students presenting their final recommendations to the clients in an in-person session, receiving feedback, and accordingly incorporating the same in the final project report.

Additionally, students who achieved an A as their letter grade received a digital badge (*Creative Content Creator- or Social Media Journalistic Content Creator*) through the Badger program of CPP.

Students were encouraged to include these digital badges in their LinkedIn profiles, curriculum vitae, and email signatures to convey their academic excellence to prospective employers.

Micro-internship Challenges

First-generation students face barriers to accessing internship opportunities. A primary barrier is their inability to pursue unpaid internships, which interferes with their work schedules and, consequently, the income that sustains their livelihoods and education (Hora, 2022). Not to mention that, as the first in their family to attend college, these students often lack the connections necessary to secure one (Blumenstyk, 2019). Even when the internships are paid, the life circumstances of these students and gendered family obligations come in the way (Wolfgram et al., 2021).

Moreover, paid internship programs are very limited for underrepresented minority students (Goldberger et al., 2021). Therefore, course-embedded MI projects enable first-generation students to access experiences that mimic an internship, thereby reducing the inequalities that often characterize traditional internships (Wingard, 2019). Micro-internships also enable faculty and community partners to co-mentor the participating students. In addition to contributing to students' career readiness, these experiences can be included as work experience on students' resumes. When funded, micro-internships also offer a stipend, which supplements students' income.

Micro-Internship Pedagogy

The extant literature on public relations pedagogy emphasizes the importance of real-client case studies as an effective learning and assessment tool for fostering student skill development (Motion & Burgess, 2014). Recent studies also reiterate the importance of real-life projects as class assignments in fostering students' skill development (McCollough et al., 2021). As mentioned earlier, the CPRE's 2023 Report

recommends that educators partner with practitioners to offer experiential learning opportunities to students, thereby facilitating their college-to-career transition. Moreover, students also benefit from the networking opportunities with potential employers, which further enhances their professional development (Saffer, 2015).

Connection to Theory and Practice

Social media platforms offer effective ways to engage with audiences through public relations and marketing communication strategies (Albanna et al., 2022; Kim, 2020). Nevertheless, social media platforms challenge professionals as these constantly update functions and features for content creation and advertising (Quesenberry, 2020). Therefore, future communication professionals must develop their professional skills beyond the classroom by engaging with real-life clients to gain skills and experience (Freberg, 2021). However, first-generation students, owing to the systemic disparities, need additional support (Cruz Paul, 2023). Course-embedded experiential-learning projects that enable students to work on real-world problems under the joint mentorship of faculty and community partners serve as opportunity brokers to enable first-generation students' professional development (Beard, 2021).

In this project, students utilized communication theories and public relations campaign models as the foundation for the social media strategy developed for clients. For example, the medium theory created an understanding of social media's features and functions as communication conduits (Meyrowitz, 2008), thereby providing guidelines for choosing platforms' post formats to engage audiences with targeted messages effectively (Windah, 2012; Qvortrup, 2006).

Framing theory was also utilized as a guideline for content creation and messaging. Framing refers to the process of selecting and highlighting specific characteristics in a communication piece (Entman, 1993). For this project, students focused on visual frames and textual frames. Visual

frames analyze how images enhance specific communication efforts (Kuan et al., 2021). For example, students used Instagram Reels videos to promote farm-to-table products from The Farm Store, featuring content such as tips for making charcuterie boards and shopping hauls for preparing recipes. Textual frames that guide how texts can highlight specific events or ideological views (Zhou & Xu, 2022) were applied for caption texts on posts. For example, The Poly Post's social media strategies used textual frames to make news pieces more salient in static posts.

Finally, we analyzed the effects of content creators and influencers on their audiences through the two-step flow theory, which explains their interpersonal influence on audiences' decision-making (Katz, 1957). In the context of strategy planning, the two-step flow informed our curation and selection of content creators and influencers for each client, based on the theory's constructs related to the social impact of representation and self-identification (Al-Adwan et al., 2023; Stansberry, 2012).

Students were required to work in teams to develop their proposals. For this purpose, we drew upon teamwork in PR agencies' collaborative work (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2021), where students worked in account executive teams to develop a strategy. Additionally, action learning for digital communication informed social media content creation lectures (Olivares et al., 2019). Students had a hands-on experience creating static and video content, thereby practicing their copywriting, editing, and graphic design skills.

Public relations dialogical communication theory serves to interpret users' interactions, enabling the development of strategies for building sustainable relationships with audiences and stakeholders (Wang & Yang, 2020). Additionally, students employed the public relations campaign model ROPE (research, objectives, planning, and execution; Freberg, 2021a) when developing their digital campaigns.

At each MI stage, students utilized digital content tools that PR and advertising agencies use for creative work. Specifically, students developed mood boards to collect clients' brand kits and product/service information, supporting the content creation processes (Omwami et al., 2024). Brand/corporate personas (John, 2017) were also incorporated to develop brand characteristics.

The audience persona tool was used to summarize critical demographic and psychographic identifiers of target audiences (Kopacz, 2022). The instructor also included a lecture on DEI implications in social media guided by the Diversity and Inclusion Wheel for PR Practitioners (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021). Moreover, students were introduced to guidelines for AI prompt engineering to create images (Oppenlaender et al., 2024). Students also used survey data provided by clients to develop the persona profiles and used AI image generators from Canva to practice AI image generation. Students' proposals were graded using a rubric informed by the CPRE guidelines (See Appendix A).

Assignment Learning Goals

- Create a social media strategy aligned with the client's goals through a briefing, platform audits, and audience and brand personas.
- Develop digital content adapted to diverse target audiences to increase reach and audience engagement.
- Develop negotiation, critical thinking, teamwork, and other relevant soft skills of future communication professionals.
- Familiarize students with professional behavior and expectations at a typical communication workplace.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

The MI had five assignment deliverables, including two discussion boards for students to assess student learning outcomes. The first discussion was completed at the beginning of the MI experience. Here,

students reflected on their career goals and discussed how social media is a tool—or even a medium—for their work. The second discussion forum prompted students to reflect on their MI experience and its contribution to their career readiness. Students also provided feedback to improve this MI project.

In the first discussion board, students frequently mentioned possible career options in the field of social media. Ten out of 26 students expressed a desire to work as social media managers, and five profiled themselves as content creators. Eleven journalism students shared how they will use social media for reporting, while six emphasized how they would also like to use Instagram or TikTok to position themselves as journalists and create an online community.

In the second discussion board, students' reflections referred to MI as an exploratory experience that provided them with a realistic preview of what it entailed to be a journalist or a PR and communication professional. Here, some students reiterated their desire to be social media managers, content creators, or journalists reporting through social media formats. For other students, the exposure made them discover their strengths and areas of development. In this regard, students mentioned:

> I didn't like the video editing part, so definitely I will shift to a role of social media manager more than a content creator, because I would rather like to work in a team with a videographer… I discovered that I am a team player rather than someone who works independently.

Moreover, students recognized the MI as an opportunity for networking. One student commented: "As challenging this project was, I felt like it was a real job. I showcased my skills to my peers." Another student agreed, "I liked getting feedback and learning from a real client." Additionally, students mentioned, "...the MI taught me how important it

is to be open to feedback for making adaptations after client reviews." Another student commented, "… I learned that is a normal process in PR agencies. Before that, I would have thought I was not doing a good job if I was asked to make changes and be upset."

Most students agreed that this experience enabled them to integrate knowledge and skills from prior courses, including communication research, public relations writing, media design, and video journalism. Additionally, students mentioned how MI offered an increased opportunity to promote their work to prospective employers by allowing them to build on their professional portfolios.

Students' success was achieved with improved grades in the research, planning, and creativity stages (See Appendix A). Students in this course successfully developed situational analysis and creative insights to enhance audience engagement and meet clients' goals for social media content. However, students earned lower grades in professional communication, a critical soft skill. For instance, students did not meet deadlines or promptly address the client's feedback. This aligns with their comments regarding their experiences.

This project offered a hands-on learning experience for students. The exposure to a professional scenario allowed them to be self-aware and learn how to be open to feedback and adapt their project to meet clients' expectations. Moreover, students could compare their prior expectations about specific job positions with real-life experiences to make informed career choices. The instructor's teaching evaluation demonstrated that 56.5% of students strongly agreed that they achieved a high-level understanding of the learning outcomes. Over 43% of students agreed that this course was a meaningful learning experience.

Clients executed several proposals from students and achieved their engagement goals. The Poly Post increased its engagement and followers (100 on Instagram and 100 on YouTube). The Communication Department experienced improved user engagement and gained new

followers (100 on Instagram and 388 on LinkedIn). The Farm Store adopted user-generated content creation strategies on Instagram to promote the CPP product line in cooking recipes. As a result, they had a 10% increase in user engagement.

Template Assignment Guide

The project was developed through scaffolded assignment deliverables submitted to advance toward the final proposal during the course of 40 work hours per student.

Deliverable 1: Briefing.

- Develop a briefing, research, and platform audit of your client. Include an audience and brand persona about each of your target audiences.

  Points: 10.

Class Discussion: Socials and your future.

- Think about what you would like to do when you graduate and envision how social media can be part of your work or even your own business. Share your ideas on our discussion board with the class.

  Points: 5.

Deliverable 2: Project Planning Presentation.

- Create three social media strategies for your client.
- Develop a mood board inspired by the client and an audience persona representing each target audience.
- Develop a slide presentation for 5-10 minutes (maximum). All the team members need to present a section of the project.

  Points: 15.

Deliverable 3: Content Development.

- Develop three posts for the strategies proposed in your plan with a text caption.
- Explain how each post addresses the client objectives developed in

the briefing.

- Present this work in progress to the client during the scheduled class visit.

  Points: 20.

Deliverable 4. Final Project.

- Present all the prior deliverables addressing the feedback provided by the client.
- Describe the strategy and explain your proposal in terms of how it addresses the goals and needs of the client.
- Present a calendar detailing the publication date, time, and format.
- Include each content piece, caption text (with hashtags).
- Present in a slide presentation format.

  Points: 15.

Deliverable 5. Final Reflection.

- Reflect on what you have learned about this class and how it relates to your career goals and plans. Did micro-internships teach you something relevant to your ideal job? Finish providing feedback and ideas on how the micro-internships can be improved. (150 characters limit).

  Points: 15.

Teaching Notes

Partnering with on-campus clients, this MI engaged students in an action-learning project that allowed them to integrate their prior knowledge in public relations, video journalism, copywriting, and media design. Consequently, it is recommended for courses with students who have met these prerequisite requirements.

Developing weekly sessions for feedback and mini-student presentations improved students' proposals and enabled them to learn from each other while honing their presentation skills. For groups larger than 27 students, instructors may require the support of a teaching assistant. This course required a computer lab with internet access to develop the

lectures and assignment deliverables. Additionally, students also used their smartphones for pictures and video recording. Design apps such as Canva, InShot, and CapCut were handy for developing social media content.

Conclusion

The MI was an impactful learning experience. Students gained the professional skills and competencies required of communication professionals in a safe environment while working on real-world problems in a setting that resembled communication-related workplaces (Toth & Bourland-Davis, 2023). It also offered a realistic job preview of what pursuing a career in social media strategy, management, and content creation implied.

Similar to an internship opportunity, students gained work experience that could be included on their resumes. Micro-internships differ from traditional internships as these involve the active mentorship of instructors who guide students as the latter applies what they learned in the classroom. For first-generation students on a commuter campus, this project offered an enriching real-world experience while adapting to their life circumstances. Students were highly motivated to see their work incorporated into clients' communication strategies and include this experience in their professional portfolios. The stipend was an added incentive for students.

DEI concepts were applied in practice through audience personas. This was a meaningful learning experience as students respectfully approached the culture, ethnicity, and personal identifiers of clients' audiences. Moreover, they learned key criteria for avoiding cultural stereotyping and overgeneralization in online communication campaigns (Bush & Lindsey, 2024; Mogull, 2024).

Embedding client-based projects that focus on a real-world problem requires a significant effort from the instructor in charge to prepare lectures, grade, and mentor students. However, it constitutes a

meaningful experience to explore public relations teaching and research on social media and strategic communication.

Extant research indicates that employers require entry-level public relations and communication professionals to possess strong leadership, teamwork, and technical skills focused on writing and social media management (Meganck et al., 2020). Additionally, media reporting must include diverse audiences and multimedia formats (Guo & Volz, 2021) for journalism positions. This project offered a safe space for students to hone their soft and technical skills.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank CPP's Academic Innovation for the support provided by the MI program. We also thank CPP's The Poly Post, Farm Store, and Communication Department.

References

Al-Adwan, A. S., Yaseen, H., Alkhawaja, M. I., Al-Majali, F. O., & Alsoud, A. R. (2023). Exploring the role of social media influencers in influencing consumers: revisiting two-step flow of communication model. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University, 58*(1), 861-872. https://doi.org/10.35741/issn.0258-2724.58.1.71

Albanna, H., Alalwan, A. A., & Al-Emran, M. (2022). An integrated model for using social media applications in non-profit organizations. *International Journal of Information Management, 63*, 102452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102452

Beard, T. A. (2021). Emerging social capital in the lives of latinx first-generation college students: The case for "apprentice agents" in a social capital framework. *Journal of First-Generation Student Success, 1*(2), 92-110. https://doi.org/10.1080/26906015.2021.1940389

Blumenstyk, G. (2019, January 14). *How "micro-interships" could make all types of students more employable*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-micro-internships-could-make-all-types-of-students-more-employable/

Bush, L., & Lindsey, K. (2024). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion in strategic communications: Becoming culturally proficient communicators*. Taylor & Francis. https://www.routledge.com/Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion-in-Strategic-Communications-Becoming-Culturally-Proficient-Communicators/Bush-Lindsey/p/book/9781032533865?srsltid=AfmBOoonyCG1O_jhkN-x66ZjLpNNfzG78vQrZm-PRuQgAVS7ue0uA8fh

Communication Department. (2024, August 28). *The Poly Post*. Communication Department Cal Poly Pomona. https://www.cpp.edu/class/communication/how-to-get-involved/the-poly-post.shtml

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Freberg, K. (2021). *Social media for strategic communication* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. https://collegepublishing.sagepub.com/products/social-media-for-strategic-communication-2-270211

Goldberger, S., McLaughlin, J., & Snyder, N. (2021, March). *Mobilizing for opportunity: Connecting low-income college students to internships and good first jobs*. Boston Foundation. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED613755

Guo, L., & Volz, Y. (2021). Toward a new conceptualization of journalistic competency: An analysis of U.S. broadcasting job announcements. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 76*(1), 91–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695820925306

Hora, M. T. (2022). Internships for all?: How inequitable access to internships hinders the promise and potential of high-impact practices and work-based learning. In *Delivering on the Promise of High-Impact Practices* (pp. 113–123). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003444022-12/internships-matthew-hora

John, B. S. (2017). *Public relations and the corporate persona: The rise of the affinitive organization*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315671635

Katz, E. (1957). The two-step flow of communication: An up-to-date report on an hypothesis. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 21*(1), 61-78. https://doi.org/10.1086/266687

Kim, C. M. (2020). *Social media campaigns: Strategies for public relations and marketing*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003020196

Kopacz, M. A. (2022). Who is Julia? Teaching audience analysis through the concept of audience persona. *Communication Teacher, 36*(2), 146–152. https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2021.1955142

Kuan, D., Hasan, N. A. M., Zawawi, J. W. M., & Abdullah, Z. (2021). Framing theory application in public relations: The lack of dynamic framing analysis in competitive context. *Media Watch, 12*(2), 333–351. https://doi.org/10.15655/mw_2021_v12i2_160155

Luttrell, R. M., & Wallace, A. (2021). Shifting the paradigm-improving student awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts through public relations campaigns. *Journal of Public Relations Education, 7*(1), 200–209. https://journalofpreducation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/8725f-jpre-71-6.21.pdf#page=200

Luttrell, Regina M., & Capizzo, L. W. (2021). *Public relations campaigns: An integrated approach* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. https://collegepublishing.sagepub.com/products/public-relations-campaigns-2-270215

McCollough, C. J., Ward, J., & Wallace, A. A. (2021). Thriving in "the new normal": Student-centered practices, design, and tools of hybrid and online learning environments. *Public Relations Education. 7* (3),144-169. https://journalofpreducation.com/2021/12/29/thriving-in-the-new-normal-student-centered-practices-design-and-tools-of-hybrid-and-online-learning-environments/

Meganck, S., Smith, J., & Guidry, J. P. D. (2020). The skills required for entry-level public relations: An analysis of skills required in 1,000 PR job ads. *Public Relations Review, 46*(5), 101973. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101973

Meyrowitz, J. (2008). Medium theory. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Literacy*, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecm064

Mogull, S. (2024). Audience personas: audience analysis documentation for rhetorical technical communications. *Planning Perspectives: 15*(1). 190-199. https://programmaticperspectives.cptsc.org/index.php/jpp/article/view/81

Motion, J., & Burgess, L. (2014). Transformative learning approaches for public relations pedagogy. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(3), 523-533. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.832163

Olivares, S. L., Adame, E., Treviño, J. I., López, M. V., & Turrubiates, M. L. (2019). Action learning: challenges that impact employability skills. *Higher Education Skills and Work-Based Learning, 10*(1), 203–216. https://doi.org/10.1108/heswbl-07-2019-0097

Omwami, A., Lahti, H., & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P. (2024). Creating inspiration by developing digital mood boards in student teams. *Techne Series, 31*(1), 65–81. https://doi.org/10.7577/technea.5361

Oppenlaender, J., Linder, R., & Silvennoinen, J. (2024). Prompting AI art: An investigation into the creative skill of prompt engineering. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2024.2431761

Cruz Paul, T. A. (2023). *Increasing first-generation students' access to high-impact practices* (dissertation).Proquest Dissertations and Thesis Global, West Carolina University. https://search.proquest.com/openview/aa1c819877513833bc75b2ac7f45b5b8/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Quesenberry, K. A. (2020). *Social media strategy: Marketing, advertising, and public relations in the consumer revolution* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield. https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/social-media-strategy-9798881850906/

Qvortrup, L. (2006). Understanding new digital media: Medium theory or complexity theory? *European Journal of Communication, 21*(3), 345–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323106066663

Saffer, A. (2015). Applying a social network perspective to public relations pedagogy: Examining the relationships that will build the profession. *Teaching Journalism & Mass Communication, 5*(1), 1-11. https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AEJMC/cb51e04d-0bbc-407c-8982-aece895b3c6f/UploadedImages/tjmc-s15-saffer.pdf

Stansberry, K. S. (2012). *One-step, two-step, or multi-step flow: The role of influencers in information processing and dissemination in online, interest-based publics* (dissertation). University of Oregon. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. http://proxy.library.cpp.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/one-step-two-multi-flow-role-influencers/docview/1038156194/se-2

The Farm Store. (2020). *The Farm Store*. The Farm Store. https://www.cpp.edu/farmstore/index.shtml

The Poly Post. (2023). *About us*. The Poly Post. https://thepolypost.com/about-us/

Toth, E. L., & Bourland-Davis, P. (November, 2023). *Navigating change: Recommendations for advising undergraduate public relations education*. CPRE. https://www.commissionpred.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CPRE-Executive-Summary-FInal-Final.pdf

Wang, Y., & Yang, Y. (2020). Dialogic communication on social media: How organizations use Twitter to build dialogic relationships with their publics. *Computers in Human Behavior, 104*, 106183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.106183

Windah, A. (2012). New social media and public relations: review of the medium theory. *Sosiologi: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Ilmu Sosial Dan Budaya, 14*(1), 21-32. https://doi.org/10.23960/sosiologi.v14i1.105

Wingard, J. (2019, March 6). *Why micro-internships will be the next big thing*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonwingard/2019/03/06/why-micro-internships-will-be-the-next-big-thing/

Wolfgram, M., Vivona, B., & Akram, T. (2021). On the intersectional amplification of barriers to college internships: A comparative case study analysis. *Harvard Educational Review, 91*(4), 457–481. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-91.4.457

Zhou, A., & Xu, S. (2022). Digital public relations through the lens of affordances: A conceptual expansion of the dialogical principles. *Journal of Public Relations Research. 33*(6), 445-463. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2022.2046585

Appendix A
Grading Rubric based on CPRE guidelines (2023)

Client Research (20 points)	High-quality, engaging, and diverse content aligns with the strategy and resonates with the target audience. Effective use of visuals, captions, hashtags, and calls to action. (18-20)	Good-quality content aligns with the strategy to engage the target audience. Appropriate use of visuals, captions, hashtags, and calls to action. (14-17)	Basic content aligns with the strategy but may not fully engage the target audience. Some use visuals, captions, hashtags, and calls to action but lack creativity. (10-13)	Poor-quality or incomplete content. It does not align with the strategy to engage the target audience. Lacks effective use of visuals, captions, hashtags, and calls to action. (9-0)
Strategy Planning (20 points)	Comprehensive social media metrics analysis. Detailed report including recommendations. Demonstrates a strong understanding of analytic metrics. (18-20)	Good analysis of social media metrics. Detailed report with some insights and recommendations. Shows a good understanding of analytics tools and techniques. (14-17)	Basic analysis of social media metrics. The report includes some data but lacks actionable insights. Shows a limited understanding of analytics tools and techniques. (10-13)	Incomplete analysis of social media metrics. The report lacks data and actionable insights. Shows a poor understanding of analytics tools and techniques. (9-0)
Strategy Execution (20 points)	Consistent and effective communication. Timely updates, clear presentations, and respectful interactions. Excellent teamwork and collaboration. (9-10)	Professional and effective communication with the client. Regular updates, clear presentations, and respectful interactions. Food teamwork and collaboration. (7-8)	Basic communication with the client. Occasional updates, adequate presentations, and generally respectful interactions. Demonstrates some teamwork and collaboration. (5-6)	Poor or inconsistent communication with the client. Infrequent updates, unclear presentations, or disrespectful interactions. Poor teamwork and collaboration. (4-0)
Analytics and Reporting (20 points)	Comprehensive social media metrics analysis. Detailed report including recommendations. Demonstrates a strong understanding of analytic metrics. (18-20)	Good analysis of social media metrics. Detailed report with some insights and recommendations. Shows a good understanding of analytics tools and techniques. (14-17)	Basic analysis of social media metrics. The report includes some data but lacks actionable insights. Shows a limited understanding of analytics tools and techniques. (10-13)	Incomplete analysis of social media metrics. The report lacks data and actionable insights. Shows a poor understanding of analytics tools and techniques. (9-0)

Professional Communication (10 points)	Consistent and effective communication. Timely updates, clear presentations, and respectful interactions. Excellent teamwork and collaboration. (9-10	Professional and effective communication with the client. Regular updates, clear presentations, and respectful interactions. Food teamwork and collaboration. (7-8)	Basic communication with the client. Occasional updates, adequate presentations, and generally respectful interactions. Demonstrates some teamwork and collaboration. (5-6)	Poor or inconsistent communication with the client. Infrequent updates, unclear presentations, or disrespectful interactions. Poor teamwork and collaboration. (4-0)
Creativity (10 points)	Highly creative and innovative approach. Demonstrates original thinking and solutions that significantly enhance the client's social media presence. (9-10)	Creative approach with several innovative ideas. Demonstrates some original thinking and solutions that enhance the client's social media presence. (7-8)	Some creativity and innovation are present but lack originality. Demonstrates limited unique solutions. (5-6)	Lacks creativity and innovation. Demonstrates no original thinking or solutions. (4-0)

Note: Developed by the course instructor

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 69-82

Teaching Brief/GIFT

AI Hackathon: Igniting and Connecting Students' Generative AI Knowledge

Regina Luttrell, Syracuse University
Jason Davis, Syracuse University
Carrie Welch, Syracuse University

ABSTRACT

An artificial intelligence (AI) hackathon was utilized in three class sessions in an innovative assignment designed for courses in public relations writing, campaigns, digital marketing, or capstone projects within communication majors to prepare students for the AI-driven modern workplace. The hackathon's objectives centered on developing students' technical understanding, practical application skills, and ability to work collaboratively with AI tools in public relations and communications contexts. Participants gained hands-on experience with image-based generative AI, demystifying the technology and exploring its strengths and weaknesses. This approach aimed to equip students with the necessary competencies to navigate and excel in communication strategies where AI can be productively incorporated. A survey of student participants revealed a positive experience as well as the acquisition of new skills.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, communication, public relations, text prompt engineering

Editorial Record: Submitted September 13, 2024. Revised November 25, 2024. Accepted May 5, 2025.

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to permeate the tools and platforms used in public relations (PR) - ranging from content creation to media analytics - it is essential for public relations students to gain hands-on experience in utilizing these technologies and recognizing their limitations. From predictive analytics to media monitoring and sentiment analysis, AI now flows through PR work in many ways (Hayes et al., 2020; Luttrell et al., 2020). Emerging PR professionals must acquire skills like text prompt engineering skills as well as an understanding of how the AI models work (and the biases within them) to stay competitive in the modern workplace (Buolamwini, 2023; Buhmann & White, 2022). This knowledge is essential as tools like text-to-image generation are currently implemented in campaign storyboarding and creative production.

At the same time, AI hackathons are increasingly becoming an educational tool, offering students a unique opportunity for trial-and-error practice with the tools that are reshaping the industry. Hackathons refer to an activity where participants are invited to "hack" - in a positive way - a tool, an idea, or a concept in order to create a quick and rapid-fire brainstorming environment (Rys, 2023). In three public relations classes, we developed a version of an AI hackathon that focused on text-to-image generation and its application in PR campaigns. This was initiated to help students develop their technical skills and deepen their understanding of AI's ethical and practical implications in their future professions.

This paper presents the design and analysis of these hackathons focused on the generative AI platform Stable Diffusion and its application in a public relations campaign. Stable Diffusion was chosen as it is one of the most updated AI text-to-image generators in terms of image detail and accuracy (Zewe, 2023). The tool employs a machine learning-based image generation technology that transforms text descriptions into high-quality images through advanced neural network processing. As with most AI image platforms, it is a paid service, but by giving students

access, we allowed them a glimpse into a leading platform they may encounter in the work world. Through collaborative image generation and text prompt engineering, students explored the power of AI, honed their creative problem-solving skills, and demonstrated the versatility of AI in a simulated client campaign. In both cases, the iterative challenge, culminating in a pitch for a fictitious company, revealed students' adeptness in refining prompts, utilizing generated images, and crafting compelling PR campaigns. As this is a new approach we looked to test, it was an ungraded, in-class assignment in each of the three classes. Post-event survey analysis affirmed the positive impact of the hackathon, highlighting its success in fostering technical understanding, practical application, and collaborative innovation.

Rationale

The term "hackathon" is a combination of the words "hack" and "marathon," where "hack" is used in the sense of exploratory programming and not necessarily in the negative application of a hacker with nefarious intentions (Rys, 2023; Heller et al., 2023). The origin of the practice dates back to the early 2000s, with one of the first events commonly referenced being the OpenBSD Hackathon in 1999 (Rys, 2023). Over the years, hackathons gained popularity with tech giants like Google and Facebook for brainstorming and team building. Hackathon events have expanded from tech culture to industry innovation and now educational settings.

As educational tools, hackathons foster innovation, enhance tech skills, and enrich learning for students and instructors (Oyetade et al., 2024; Sajja et al., 2024; Hussein et al., 2023). Many hackathons prioritize including marginalized groups in tech and are popular in varying industries and educational settings for both learning and forming connections through networking (Garcia, 2023; Yuen & Wong, 2021). The surge in online and virtual hackathons, especially during COVID-19,

boosted participation in the practice across corporate, government, and non-profit sectors (Yuen & Wong, 2021).

A successful hackathon sparks ideas, which drive refinement, mindset shifts, and academic or business change (Krämer & Trischler, 2023). As AI continues to redefine both teaching and the field of public relations, we looked for a method to integrate the technology in an engaging way. In this classroom application, we found it appropriate to employ the hackathon-inspired format as we led students in a senior-level capstone course through the process of AI image and text prompt engineering and its application in a PR campaign. Students were familiarized with campaign creation, its components, and process earlier in the course and in previous classes.

Hackathon Learning Objectives

The hackathon served as a practice platform that would intrigue the students, provide a unique platform for learning, and prepare participants for the modern workplace, where generative AI plays an increasingly significant role. Our objectives were to:

- Improve students' technical understanding of text-to-image AI generator and text prompt engineering.
- Provide practical learning application through a hands-on experience where students work with Stable Diffusion to see how image-based, generative AI functions.
- Demystify the AI tool while exploring its strengths, weaknesses and biases.
- Practice collaborative teamwork when applying AI tools to public relations campaigns.

By fostering a technical understanding of these principles, we hoped to equip our students with the competencies needed to navigate and excel in workplaces where AI may drive or play a role in the creation of communication strategies, ensuring they have the skills necessary to adapt and be successful in today's workplace.

How The Hackathon was Class-Tested

Pre-Hackathon Setup

Each hackathon required one class session to complete. The instructors guided students through the essential preparations for the hackathon. These steps included familiarizing students with the basics of generative AI, discussing its applications in public relations, identifying potential biases in the model, and outlining the objectives and expectations for the upcoming event.

- Definition of student teams and logins: Students were broken into four teams and successfully logged into the AI image generator platform. Instructors had prepared access to Stable Diffusion for the activity in advance.
- Initial preparation: A slide on time management was shown, outlining the tasks and timing allotted for the day.
- Practice round: Students uploaded their first-round photos to a shared Google Slides document for practice.
- Discussion of criteria of success: The team that generated images closest to the prompt images would win the challenge.

Hackathon Timeline and Process

First Challenge: Image of a Waterfall

Figure 1

Prompt 1: Image of a Waterfall

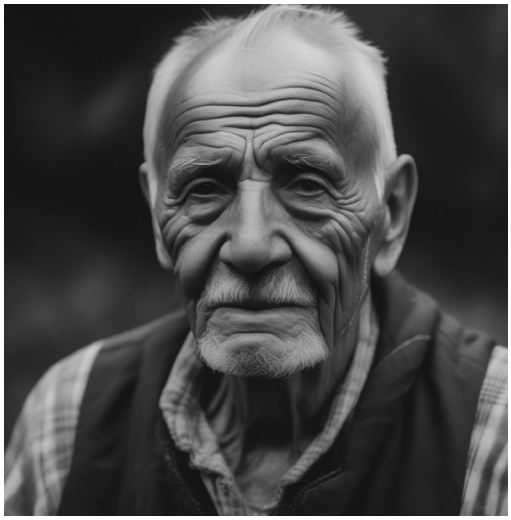
The hackathons officially began by generating a text prompt to create a waterfall image that mirrored Figure 1 as closely as possible. The atmosphere in each classroom was serious as students studied the displayed image on the screen and brainstormed relevant words for their prompts to try and match it as closely as possible. As they generated images, students saved drafts, choosing the best one for competition submission. With image after image generated quickly, there was notable excitement when students' images closely resembled the target during each session.

The teams that emerged victorious in the first round of the hackathon were able to use the text prompts to match the Impressionist painting style of the waterfall image with a high degree of accuracy. Their successes set a high standard for the competition and increased the anticipation level for the next challenge.

Second Challenge: Image of an Older Man

Figure 2

Prompt 2: Image of an Older Man



The second challenge involved generating an image of an older man, and students approached the task with focus (see Figure 2 for image prompt). Instructors provided guidance on using negative prompts and how to refine prompt instructions further. Examples include directions such as "deep wrinkles" to emphasize the age of the person and making facial expressions, "grumpy" versus "sad." The techniques included the importance of making prompts increasingly more specific, selecting appropriate styles and words, altering word order, and using brackets for emphasis, which were also covered. In addition, one instructor highlighted the need to understand AI's unique, analytical approach: "AI speaks differently, analyzes differently than we do and you have to learn how to speak its language if you want it to do what you want it to do."

This portion of the hackathon also allowed for a deeper discussion of AI algorithmic bias. By discussing the different words the students had to choose to move the model in the directions that were more favorable to matching the target image, they learned that some words are more biased regarding race and gender than others.

Third Challenge: Image of a Duck Wearing a Hat Swimming in a Pond

Figure 3

Prompt 3: Image of a Duck Wearing a Hat Swimming in a Pond

The third challenge of the hackathon was met with an energetic response from the students; in all sessions, they gained an understanding of the tasks more and more. Bursts of excitement erupted as teams generated a close image. Overall, the generation of an image where the duck was swimming in a pond with a small, black top hat on its head proved quite difficult for most groups to create (see Figure 3 for image prompt). This round showcased groups' resilience and willingness to try different approaches when some did not work.

Final Challenge: Winner Takes All

The final round presented a new task: teams had 15 minutes to create a client campaign pitch for the fictional The Pet Wedding Company. We used the cumulative scores from the first rounds to allow teams to choose their presentation order for the final round. The team that placed 1st got the first choice of when to present—either first, last, or another slot. The 2nd place team had the second pick, and so on. This small advantage gave value to the earlier rounds, making teams feel like their performance mattered. This challenge required teams to compile four slides, including at least two AI-generated images, and deliver a 90-second PR campaign pitch. The topic represents a safe, fun space to practice, closely aligned with the third challenge of a live animal. The combination of the third task and the final campaign can also be easily tuned to fit other course application focus areas. The students energetically collaborated: sharing images, dividing tasks, and solving problems in real-time, realistically mimicking a professional work environment.

AI-Generated Team Campaign Presentations

Each team displayed thoughtful, creative strategies in their presentations, which disrupted traditional campaign development, bypassing the long lead times and expense of still photography, facilitating the exploration of creating copy and images side-by-side in real time (see Figure 4 for example images). Several teams focused on the creative

application of images, proposing pet costume ideas and cake flavors. Others highlighted various religious services with images of a priest cat and a rabbi bunny, and also generated sample food menus. Still more developed a social media campaign for pet weddings, featuring hashtags like #FUReverTogether with generated images of dogs at a wedding service. Finally, one team emphasized inclusivity and practicality, including images of fish and strategies for managing unruly pets.

Figure 4

Student-generated images examples for the pet wedding campaign.

Empirical Evidence of Learning Outcomes

The hackathon showcased an effective pedagogical approach to teaching AI technology, fostering not only technical skills but also creativity, teamwork, and real-world problem-solving capabilities. The exercise proved beneficial in helping students understand and effectively communicate with AI technology, and a subsequent survey of students supports these observations from the instructors. This survey, conducted anonymously in-class at the end of the activity, included three sessions of students who participated in the AI hackathon in-class activity and provided valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of this innovative pedagogical approach. The survey used a Likert scale ranging

from 1 (not true at all) to 4 (very true) to gauge student responses to various aspects of the hackathon.

Skill Acquisition in Text Prompt Engineering

A significant 89% (25 out of 28) of the students reported a high level of agreement (very true) on learning how to use strategic text prompt engineering more effectively for image generation. Students also agreed that they learned how different subject types require different text prompt engineering approaches, with 82% replying positively, which suggests the hackathon successfully imparted practical skills in prompt engineering. A significant 88.9% (24 out of 28) of participants acknowledged a better understanding of the capabilities and limitations of generative AI tools, reflecting an understanding of technical aspects and AI's potential and limitations.

Design and Structure of the Exercise

The design and structure of the exercises were well-received, with 81% of students answering positively. This high approval rating indicates that the hackathon was organized in a manner that facilitated learning and engagement. Additionally, 96% (27 out of 28) of the students felt that the class was engaging and interactive, which is indicative of the hackathon's success in creating an active learning environment that encouraged student participation and interest.

Team and Hackathon Style Approach

The team and hackathon-style approach to learning were particularly popular among the students, with 96% enjoying this method. This approach likely fostered a sense of collaboration and real-world problem-solving, enhancing the learning experience. In addition, 96% of the students felt that the material was presented in a fun and approachable way, which is essential in maintaining student interest and aiding in the absorption of complex concepts.

Relevance of the Topic

The relevance of the topic overall was recognized by 89% of the students (25 of 28). However, when asked about the value of understanding these concepts for entering the workforce, 78% (22 of 28 responses) of the students deemed it very valuable. This highlights the importance of integrating contemporary and emerging technologies into the curriculum for professional preparation. The hackathon can play an educational role in equipping students with skills that are important and in demand in today's job market.

Recommendation Likelihood

Finally, when asked about the likelihood of recommending this in-class exercise to a friend or peer, an overwhelmingly positive response was observed: 21 out of 28 students rated their likelihood of recommendation as 10 out of 10, and four students rated it at nine. This indicates a strong endorsement of the hackathon's educational value and enjoyment factor. Student survey responses that exemplified this included, "I thought this exercise was extremely fun and engaging. I can see any student in other classes enjoying this activity" and "We had so much fun!" The survey results indicate a highly positive reception of the AI hackathon in-class activity among participating students. The hackathon was effective in teaching important aspects of AI, such as prompt engineering and understanding AI capabilities and limitations. The interactive, team-based approach, coupled with engaging and well-structured exercises, contributed significantly to the student's enjoyment and perceived relevance of the topic.

Hackathon Appraisal

The hackathon format is beneficial as an educational tool as it generates innovative solutions for industry and academic challenges, boosts the skill sets in the use of the technology deployed in the event,

and improves the interactive educational experience for both students and instructors. It is designed to create rapid learning through trial and error using several quick iterations. This creates a safe space that allows and even expects failure as part of the learning process. This teaching model can help reduce a participant's hesitancy and anxiety about taking risks when exploring and adopting new technology. It particularly aligns with the fast pace of public relations and lends itself to the resiliency needed to be successful in the industry.

A limitation that must be addressed is the racial and gender biases present in image generators and AI tools at large. These biases, stemming from the datasets used to train such AI systems, can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and unequal representations. Instructors must incorporate discussions about bias as a part of the activity, as was done in this case. By pointing out instances of racial and gender bias, educators raise awareness among students and foster critical thinking regarding the ethical use and development of AI technologies.

References

Buhmann, & White, C. (2022). Artificial Intelligence in public relations: Role and implications. In A. Buhmann, C. L. White, R. Luttrell, J. H., Lipschultz, & K. Freberg (Eds.), *The Emerald Handbook of Computer-Mediated Communication and Social Media* (pp. 625–638). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80071-597-420221036

Buolamwini, J. (2023). *Unmasking AI: My mission to protect what is human in a world of machines*. Random House.

Garcia, M.B. (2023). Fostering an innovation culture in the education sector: A scoping review and bibliometric analysis of hackathon research. *Innovative Higher Education. 48*, 739–762. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-023-09651-y

Hayes, J., Britt, B. C., Evans, W., Rush, S. W., Towery, N. A., & Adamson, A. C. (2020). Can social media listening platforms' artificial intelligence be trusted? Examining the accuracy of Crimson Hexagon's (now Brandwatch Consumer Research's) AI-driven analyses. *Journal of Advertising, 50*(1): 81–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1809576

Heller, B., Amir, A., Waxman, R., & Maaravi, Y. (2023). Hack your organizational innovation: Literature review and integrative model for running hackathons. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. 12*, Article 6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-023-00269-0

Hussein, E., Thron, C., Govender, K., Vaccari, M., Tucker, W. (2023, October 2). *A comprehensive framework for hackathon-driven educational research*. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4687314

Krämer, H. & Trischler, R. (2023). Designing postdigital futures—The case of hackathons. *Postdigital Science and Education, 6*, 52-71. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-023-00412-w

Luttrell, R., Wallace, A., McCollough, C., & Lee, J. (2020). The digital divide: Addressing artificial intelligence in communication education. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 75*(4), 470-482. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695820925286

Oyetade, K., Harmse, A., & Zuva, T. (2024). Review of hackathon adoption factors in education. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science, 13*(2), 324-335. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v13i2.3143

Rys, M. (2023). Invention development. The hackathon method. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice. 21*(3), 499-511. https://doi.org/10.1080/14778238.2021.1911607

Sajja, R., Erazo, C., Li, Z., Demiray, B. Z., Sermet, Y., & Demir, I. (2024). Integrating generative AI in hackathons: Opportunities, challenges, and educational implications. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2401.17434*. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2401.17434

Yuen, K. K. F. & Wong, A. O. M. (2021). *Designing an effective hackathon via university-industry collaboration for data science education*. Paper presented at the IEEE International Conference on Engineering, Technology & Education (TALE). Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. https://doi.org/10.1109/TALE52509.2021.9678826

Zewe, A. (2023, November 9). *Explained: Generative AI. MIT News*. https://news.mit.edu/2023/explained-generative-ai-1109

Journal of Public Relations Education
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2, 83-88

Book Review

The Public Relations Handbook

Reviewed by
Kristen Heflin, Kennesaw State University

Editor: Robert L. Dilenschneider
Publisher: BenBella Books, Inc., 2022
ISBN: ISBN-13: 9781637740613
https://benbellabooks.com/shop/the-public-relations-handbook/
Number of pages: 280

The Public Relations Handbook is a useful resource for public relations students, aspiring PR professionals, and public relations educators looking for real-world examples, advice, and case studies to better understand the current state of public relations. Edited by Robert L. Dilenschneider, The Public Relations Handbook features chapters on a range of topics from public relations planning to specialized fields of public relations to international public relations.

While it provides excellent examples and lessons, it is not a textbook. There are no exercises, few systematic discussions of concepts, and almost no citations of external sources. Rather, it's an edited collection of chapters on a wide variety of current public relations topics written by industry professionals. As such, it would be a good supplemental reading to add context to an undergraduate or graduate level public relations course but would not function well as the sole text for a course.

Content and Scope

The Public Relations Handbook begins with a set of chapters that cover aspects relevant to strategic planning. Chapter 1 discusses the role of public relations in connecting clients with the communities they serve, the importance of being "nimble, creative, and transparent" (p. 12), and ways to help clients get news coverage. Chapter 2 uses several case studies to demonstrate the importance of research (or "intelligence programs") for conducting due diligence, gathering strategic intelligence, monitoring risks, developing media campaigns, exposing wrongdoing, and addressing crises. Chapter 3 provides tips for developing arguments, presentations, and pitches with suggestions for giving "contrarian advice" (p. 28), keeping it simple, and entertaining the audience. Chapter 4 features an essay from pollster Frank Luntz about the importance of public opinion, language, and polling for effective public relations. This chapter also provides what Luntz calls "a collection of the most impactful words and phrases for almost any business situation," (p. 43), which would

be helpful for students or PR professionals looking for tips on effective message development. Chapter 5 covers the steps of strategic planning by explaining what the author calls the SO SMArTT model, which includes seven elements: Situation, Objectives, Strategies, Messages, Audiences, related Tactics, and Timeline," (p. 51). This chapter also provides some real-world examples of strategies, the traits of effective messages, and a good discussion of the distinction between strategies and tactics.

The next set of chapters in The Public Relations Handbook covers specialized fields of public relations. In Chapter 6, "Government Relations: Setting a Public Policy Agenda," the authors provide a step-by-step discussion of the components of a successful government relations program, including tactics such as lobbying, coalition building and grassroots organizing. Chapter 7 focuses on investor relations with sections on current terminology and practices such as holding an investor day, conducting media relations, and taking a company public. Chapter 8 focuses on media relations, providing a list of specific media relations tactics, sections on media training, a discussion of the rising importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), tips for dealing with negative news, and a checklist of principles for working with journalists. In Chapter 9, "Social Media: Evolving Best Practices for PR Practitioners," the author provides an overview of the different types of social media platforms, basic guidelines for social media use, a list of competencies required for social media management, and a discussion of the ways social media is used by practitioners including media relations, influencer relations and social media monitoring. Chapter 10 takes a deep dive into internal communications with case studies and guidance for conducting effective mission, vision, and values-based internal relations. Chapter 11 focuses on preparing and implementing a crisis plan, offering case studies and a discussion of the role of social media in a crisis. Chapter 12 provides insight on the role of public relations in managing the internal and external communication of wealthy "private families," including tips

on how to work within complicated family structures. Finally, chapter 16 offers a thorough discussion of public relations within higher education and presents a full example of a public relations plan for a university using the RACE model.

The last set of chapters focus on public relations in China (Ch. 13), Japan (Ch. 14), Canada (Ch. 15) and Europe (Ch. 17). Each chapter provides historical context and gives detailed advice from professionals on how to navigate cultural differences, prepare for business meetings, understand the media landscape, and pitch the media.

Contribution to Public Relations Education

The Public Relations Handbook contributes to public relations education by providing, advice, examples, and case studies that can help students, PR professionals, and academics more fully understand current best practices. It also provides an overview of several different fields of PR that are often not covered in PR textbooks, such as investor relations, communications for private families, and public relations for higher education. The chapters on conducting public relations in China, Japan, Canada, and Europe are particularly noteworthy for their specific, practical guidance, which would be incredibly helpful for someone interested in learning more about what it would be like to work in public relations outside of the United States.

Critique

The main weakness of this text stems from its structure as an edited compilation of essays from industry professionals, where each chapter is written by a different author with a different writing style, agenda, and approach to public relations. While these industry voices are indeed a major strength of this book, the authors provide their own advice, without referencing outside sources to support their case. There is no bibliography and only a few chapters offer additional recommended readings. There are areas throughout the book where the authors could

have referenced scholarship, outside texts, or news stories to strengthen their discussion or to lend additional credibility to their approach.

Another related issue is that some chapters offer examples of PR planning models and objectives that differ from what is typically covered in undergraduate PR programs and textbooks, which could be confusing to students. For example, Chapter 5 discusses strategic planning using what the author calls the SO SMArTT model, which is a solid approach, but differs slightly from the public relations models covered in most PR textbooks. There are also several instances where objectives are discussed, but the examples are missing key elements of SMART objectives.

Still, *The Public Relations Handbook* does not position itself as an academic work or a textbook, and having a diversity of viewpoints can be useful in understanding the various ways professionals practice their craft.

Audience

The Public Relations Handbook would be a useful resource for undergraduate or graduate-level PR students looking for more insights from professionals in the field. While it is not written as a textbook, it would be a solid addition to a reading list for courses such as PR Case Studies, International PR, PR Management or PR Strategies and Tactics. It would also be helpful for students or entry-level PR practitioners who are interested in learning more about the various fields of specialization within public relations. PR instructors would also find The Public Relations Handbook useful as it provides a wealth of current advice and case studies from PR professionals that could be used to supplement course textbooks and lectures.

Conclusion

The Public Relations Handbook is an interesting read, packed with tips, examples, and case studies. It offers practical insights on the current practice of public relations. It makes several useful contributions to public relations education, but it is not a textbook, and I would not

use it as a stand-alone textbook for a class. Instead, it could be useful as a supplemental reading because it provides real-world examples that demonstrate how the concepts presented in a textbook are put into practice.

Book Review

Crisis Communication Case Studies on COVID-19: Multidimensional Perspectives and Applications

Reviewed by
Yeonsoo Kim, The University of Texas at Austin

Editors: Mildred Perreault and Sarah Smith-Frigerio
Publisher: Peter Lang, 2024
ISBN: 9781433192234
DOI: 10.3726/b18897
Number of pages: 398

The authors effectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of crisis communication and responses in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, encompassing various phases and complexities across all societal levels. Recognizing that traditional crisis communication literature may not fully capture the intricacies of such events, this book provides a comprehensive examination of the challenges and practices associated with pandemic-related crisis communication. Organized into four major categories, individual, organizational, community/regional, and national/international, the book utilizes a case study format to explore these complexities. Each chapter presents essential background information, including theoretical concepts and/or contextual information, before detailing a case study and concluding with discussion questions. This structure ensures readers gain a holistic understanding of crisis communication, moving beyond isolated examples to grasp the broader context and relevant background information.

Structure and Content

Chapter 1 offers a roadmap for readers, outlining the core arguments and contributions of each chapter.

Chapters 2-5 explore individual-level responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring how people navigated the challenges of uncertainty, isolation, and loss. Chapter 2 analyzes how individuals sought and evaluated information during the pandemic, drawing on uncertainty management theory to examine the influence of different sources like social media, traditional media, and interpersonal communication. The chapter reveals that social media users often demonstrated lower levels of knowledge and trust compared to those relying on other sources. Chapter 3 examines the #AloneTogether hashtag campaign, illustrating how social media can be a powerful tool for fostering connection and combating social isolation during times of crisis. The chapter analyzes the types of support offered through the campaign and its impact on mitigating the

challenges of loneliness. Chapter 4 explores the impact of the pandemic on working parents, focusing on the challenges of maintaining work-life balance amid the rise of remote work. The chapter investigates the phenomenon of blurred boundaries between professional and personal spheres and highlights the disproportionate burden faced by women. Chapter 5 investigates how individuals and communities utilized social media to grieve and cope with loss in the context of COVID-19 deaths. Grounded in social mourning theory, the chapter showcases diverse expressions of mourning and emphasizes the role of social media in facilitating collective grieving.

Chapters 6-9 focus on organizational crisis communication, examining how entities navigated the complexities of the pandemic. Chapter 6 examines the challenges faced by higher education institutions in communicating with stakeholders during the pandemic. The chapter analyzes university response messaging and critiques the lack of spaces for communal grieving and dialogue. Chapter 7 analyzes how companies in the restaurant and airline industries adapted their communication strategies to address the disruptions. The chapter explores the use of integrated marketing communication, social listening, and digital adaptations. Chapter 8 investigates the "It's Up to You" vaccination awareness campaign through a critical lens, analyzing how advertising was used to disseminate public health messages and encourage vaccination across various communication channels. Chapter 9 examines fan reactions to the NFL's COVID-19 protocols, using situational crisis communication theory and image repair theory to analyze social media conversations. The chapter finds that social media served primarily as a channel for fan complaints rather than relationship building.

Chapters 10-14 examines the pandemic's impact on specific groups, communities, and regional areas. Chapter 10 presents a

meta-analysis of early research on journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing upon Bourdieu's Field Theory, it examines how the pandemic affected journalists, audiences, and the role of social media in disseminating news. The authors call for a shift in journalistic practices to better respond to the challenges of crises like the pandemic. Chapter 11 examines rural health practices and communication efforts in Tennessee, focusing on how hospitals used social media to communicate with the public about COVID-19 preventative measures. The chapter analyzes both institutional and individual provider communication patterns, employing the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model and a grounded theory approach to identify key themes and challenges. Chapter 12 investigates how different generations perceive COVID-19 risks and how their media consumption habits influence these perceptions. The study found high-risk perception across all generations and analyzes how reliance on various media sources affects individuals' perceived susceptibility to the virus, its severity, and the efficacy of preventive measures. Chapter 13 provides an in-depth analysis of how Indigenous communities responded to COVID-19. Focusing on Native female politicians, the chapter examines how these leaders managed community information and addressed crises within the pandemic context. It also explores the ongoing challenges of preserving Indigenous heritage amidst external pressures and the alarming rise of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls during this period. Chapter 14 examines how US nurses utilized TikTok to cope with burnout and increased job risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. the chapter identifies key themes of individual and community resilience, highlighting the use of storytelling, peer support, public education, and dark humor.

Lastly, chapters 15-19 focus on national and international levels of cases studies including each nation or government approaches. Chapter 15 analyzes US political rhetoric, linking the pandemic to existing political

crises and examining the challenges faced by communicators when public health crises collide. This chapter explores pandemic response through a dynamic crisis communication lens, reviewing existing literature and offering a rhetorical critique. It concludes with practical applications such as avoiding false dichotomies, preventing politicization, and clearly communicating risks to affected publics. Chapter 16 explores how journalists navigated reporting on climate change and natural disasters during the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing coverage of various natural disasters in national newspapers across several countries, this chapter investigates how disaster response systems were potentially weakened or strengthened while operating alongside COVID-19 responses. Chapter 17 examines the Black Lives Matter movement through the lens of critical race theory, exploring how the pandemic exposed deep-rooted health inequities and systemic racism in America. It analyzes messages emerging from memes, X (formerly Twitter), and Reddit posts, identifying key themes emphasizing BLM and COVID-19, and discussing their implications for critical race theory. Chapter 18 analyzes how COVID-19 fueled anti-Asian racism through #chinesevirus messages on Facebook. It examines which messages garnered the most engagement and how this hashtag correlated with different emotional reactions, revealing social media's potential for both combating and fueling prejudice. Chapter 19 analyzes COVID-19 responses in the US, Sweden, and Italy to understand how these governments communicated to reduce public uncertainty. Using tweets and press releases from public health organizations in each country, the study compares communication strategies, objectives, styles, and leadership approaches. It offers recommendations for navigating future pandemics.

In the concluding Chapter 20, the editors summarize key contributions and outline future research directions, offering practical implications and a thoughtful closing to the volume.

Contributions and Audience

Current crisis communication literature may fall short of capturing the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic's profound and enduring global impact, including its associated crisis management and communication practices. This book, however, offers helpful insights into the diverse landscape of crisis communication practices during the pandemic, providing a comprehensive understanding of its challenges and applications. It features extensive case studies spanning various societal layers and perspectives on crisis communication in both traditional and new media, encompassing regional and international contexts and diverse professions. These studies offer practical insights for professionals and students alike, presenting real-life scenarios that facilitate discussions and bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications. This book offers an important supplementary resource for courses in both crisis and health communication, enriching academic exploration with real-world case studies. While the text proves valuable for both undergraduate and graduate curricula, its utility varies considerably between the two levels. For undergraduate students, the case studies offer practical, introductory insights. However, the book's depth and applicability are particularly noteworthy for graduate-level courses focused on crisis communication. Therefore, I recommend this text as a supplementary reading for undergraduates and a more central, though not necessarily required, resource for graduate students specializing in crisis communication.

Critique and Conclusion

While this book presents a valuable collection of case studies, there's room to enhance consistency and reader experience. Currently, chapters vary significantly in their approach: some employ descriptive quantitative research, even including hypotheses; others offer in-depth analyses of a case without a specified research method; and others

utilize rhetorical, critical, or other forms of analysis. While this variety showcases the diverse applications of case studies, clearer guidelines for chapter structure would create a more cohesive reading experience. For instance, beginning each chapter with clear objectives, a concise abstract or summary, and key highlights or takeaways would help readers quickly grasp the chapter's purpose and main points. Similarly, consistent presentation of theoretical frameworks and key terms across all chapters would aid reader comprehension. Each chapter could also benefit from explicitly stated research questions to enhance clarity and focus. Currently, the inclusion of these elements varies across chapters. Finally, the discussion questions could be further developed. Strengthening the connections between the case studies and existing research and theory would help practitioners and students connect these real-world examples to broader academic understanding, fostering more meaningful reflection.

The COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented crisis in both scale and impact, demands a deeper understanding of crisis communication and response strategies tailored to such events. This book answers that call, providing rich case studies for researchers and students to explore the complexities of pandemic-related communication.

Journal of Public Relations Education (JPRE)

Special Issue Call for Papers
"Elevating PR: Insights and Trends in Graduate Education"

Manuscript Due Date: 08/07/2025
Anticipated Publication: January 2026 JPRE 12(1)

Guest Editors
Emily S. Kinsky, West Texas A&M University
Charles Lubbers, University of South Dakota
Adrienne A. Wallace, Grand Valley State University
Pamela G. Bourland-Davis, Georgia Southern University (posthumously)

Since 1975, the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) has studied undergraduate and graduate public relations education standards and practices, with the bulk of its effort being to lessen the gap between the profession and the academy at the undergraduate level. In 1999, the CPRE "Port of Entry" report addressed the university as the official "port of entry" for those who seek to make public relations a career, citing both undergraduate and graduate education as the tooling and retooling centers of the public relations profession. Then, the last official CPRE report on graduate education was released in 2012, "Standards for a Master's Degree in Public Relations: Educating for Complexity." With the growth of master's-level public relations education in recent years and the splintering of methods, modes of delivery, theory, and practice, this special issue attempts to bridge the gap that exists in pedagogy related to PR graduate education with an issue solely dedicated to graduate education in public relations.

The purpose of this special issue call is to invite research articles, teaching briefs, scholarly and critical essays, and case studies, and we are especially interested in articles that explore BOTH the challenges and opportunities for public relations pedagogy focusing on graduate-level education in the public relations classroom. Submissions that offer practical knowledge and guidance for ONLY graduate public relations education are encouraged. We invite original submissions, and areas of focus could include but are not limited to:

- How practitioner expectations align with graduate education
- Best practices for internships in applied master's programs
- Applied theory at the graduate level
- International approaches to graduate education
- Developing research and data analytical abilities for practice
- How graduate programs connect with the demands of the profession
- Innovative approaches to graduate education (e.g., unique course offerings, new ideas for projects and assignments)
- CEPR graduate-level certifications (e.g., tips, benefits)

Submission Guidelines

Submissions should follow the Author Guidelines on the JPRE website. Authors should include the **special call name (SIGradPR)** in parentheses after their manuscript title to indicate the submission is for this particular special call. Authors should submit their manuscript through Scholastica, the online submission system for *JPRE*. All submissions will be anonymously reviewed, following the guidelines of *JPRE*. Authors must use APA style for citations, references, tables, figures, and captions, plus follow the JPRE Styleguide. All identifying information must be deleted before full paper submissions.

Timeline with Key Dates

- Deadline for full manuscript submission to JPRE's Scholastica submission portal: https://jpre.scholasticahq.com/ - **08/07/2025**
- Notification of review results, including invitations for revision and resubmission (R&R): **August 2025**
- Deadline for R&R submission: **09/30/2025**
- Scheduled Publication: **January 2026 12(1)**

If you have any questions, please contact the guest editors for additional information.

Dr. Emily S. Kinsky, West Texas A&M University, ekinsky@wtamu.edu
Dr. Chuck Lubbers, University of South Dakota, chuck.lubbers@usd.edu
Dr. Adrienne A. Wallace, Grand Valley State University, wallacad@gvsu.edu

AEJMC
JPRE
Public Relations Division
Journal of Public Relations Education

A publication of the Public Relations Division of AEJMC