

In the Lineup or on the Bench? Searching for PR in Sports Management Master's Programs

Betsy Emmons, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Elizabeth S. Cox, University of Kansas

ABSTRACT

Sport management master's programs are young and increasingly popular graduate programs at many United States universities. As public relations is a key employment area within sport organizations, this research reviewed whether public relations is taught at sport management master's programs, and if so, what strategies and tactics were presented. Results indicated that a majority of sport management master's programs included at least one course with public relations learning outcomes. However, PR management, strategy, and tactic presentation were inconsistent among programs, and some programs reported only an ancillary address of PR. Implications for more consistent and pedagogically-grounded PR learning outcomes are discussed, along with opportunities for curricular development bodies in PR to play more active roles in advising non-PR master's programs on PR education.

Keywords: sport management, graduate education, public relations, sport communication, master's degree

Editorial Record: Submitted August 7, 2024. Revised and accepted November 28, 2025.

Interest in academic majors in the sport industry has expanded in the past decades (Schwab et al., 2013). Many students report that they choose sport majors because the career options are evident—they can see sport staff in highly visible positions near game action (Coche & Haught, 2021). Undergraduate degree programs in sport management, sport administration, sport marketing, sport journalism, and sport communication have increased manyfold as universities rush to meet student demand, especially in an enrollment-uncertain era in higher education (see Emmons et al., 2025; Hancock & Greenwell, 2013; Hull et al., 2019; Schwab et al., 2013).

Sport industry graduate programs have likewise increased in popularity (Pierce et al., 2022; Willett et al., 2017). With graduate enrollments also experiencing uncertainty (Knox, 2023), there is a simultaneous rush to expand graduate school offerings in areas that support student demand. Undergraduate sport media and communication programs have been studied for curricular content and related career preparation (see Coche & Haught, 2021; Emmons et al., 2025; Hull et al., 2019), and graduate programs have seen some but less research attention, mostly centered within the program curricula themselves (see Pierce et al., 2022; Willett et al., 2017). Researching curricular content adds key insights into what skills and concepts are deemed foundational in such programs and highlights any gaps that exist.

Public relations and sport industry graduate degrees inevitably collide when considering the strategic communication role in the sport industry. Many early career experiences in the sport industry are through marketing and communication positions, with public relations and event management in sport even listed as entry-level career ideas (What, n.d.).

A concern emerges when reviewing the rise of sport master's programs; many of the degrees stake claims over one another as the major for a career path in sport operations broadly defined, without

acknowledging varying skill sets that might be more impactful for students interested in certain areas of sport. With sport public relations, undergraduate programs have uncertain learning objectives for understanding the industry (Emmons et al., 2025), so reviewing graduate programs for how and where public relations is presented may better address the industry or similar uncertainty at the graduate level. This research reviews master's degree programs in the sport industry, specifically through accredited sport management programs, to discern how public relations is presented and taught.

Literature Review

Public Relations Career Paths in Sport

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook (2025b), positions within public relations (public relations specialists) are expected to grow faster than average at 6% between 2023 and 2033. When looking specifically at media/communication positions under the sport and entertainment umbrella (arts, design, entertainment, sport, and media occupations), the expected growth reaches 8% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a). These numbers make sense as universities have shown an increased interest in developing and offering sport communication and media majors to meet student demand (Hull et al., 2019), which has been attributed to the growing attention toward sport (Coombs, 2024).

As L'Etang (2013) argued, sport as a modern enterprise would not exist without the media and PR; the foundation of professionalized sport depends on media and promotion. Sport as an industry requires effective strategic communication. From a longevity standpoint, businesses within the sport space need to drive revenue and positive reputations, which can be fostered through strategic communication functions such as public relations (Coombs, 2024; Coombs & Harker, 2022). In addition, the broad impact of the sport industry overall lends itself to communication. "Sport

connects us to community, sport is entertainment, and sport even offers us a platform for social justice and helps our communities—through the entertainment of sport—to work toward cultural equalities” (Coombs & Harker, 2022, p. 4). Knowledge of public relations and strategic communication is a vital part of reaching business objectives in sport.

Sport at the Graduate Level and Sport Management Programs

In order to discern how a prospective student with an interest in a graduate degree in sport PR might find programs, researchers conducted a Google search. Internet searches of graduate program websites are a primary way for prospective students to learn about graduate degree options (Rios et al., 2019). The researchers based the search on the premise that a prospective student would look for graduate degrees available for someone interested in the public relations and strategic communications aspect of the sport industry.

Finding graduate programs as a prospective student in the sport industry might be done via online search engines or through college aggregator sites. For the purposes of this research, a Google search was conducted to learn what sport industry graduate program options existed. A query for “sport master’s program” yielded a Google Gemini result that the sport management degree would offer opportunities in administration, marketing, and analytics in sport. A Google search of the term “sport public relations graduate program” did not yield results for graduate program options in communication, but rather sport management programs. Finally, a follow-up search of “sport master’s degree” showed two primary paths: kinesiology-related sport graduate programs and sport business-related programs.

To ensure that the search results were valid, a follow-up query was conducted on the U.S. Department of Education’s College Navigator site. This site uses university CIP (classification of instructional program) code data to populate degree program information. The site displayed

similar results for sport management as the appropriate master's degree for someone interested in sport, while mentioning that sport business and sport communication jobs would be applicable from a sport management program. In other words, someone interested in sport public relations as a graduate degree option would be steered toward a sport management master's degree.

Kinesiology and exercise science graduate degrees sometimes include management aspects of the sport industry, but the field has mostly divided into separate sport management focused graduate programs, as the latter part of the 20th century demonstrated (Jones et al., 2008; Zeigler, 1987). Sport management is any function that "includes any combination of skills related to planning, organizing, directing, controlling, budgeting, leading, and evaluating within the context of an organization or department whose primary product or service is related to sport and/or physical activity" (DeSensi et al., 1990, p. 33). The *Journal of Sport Management*'s inaugural issue spoke to the rise of the academic area, with primary attention given to the fact that sport was business and those rising into leadership in sport already had physical education and exercise knowledge, but less management training (Zeigler, 1987). Tellingly, Zeigler (1987) also noted in *JSM*'s inaugural issue that, "sports managers need a better understanding of marketing... promotion, publicity" (p. 9) and advertising. Research about sport management master's programs continues to lag behind undergraduate program study; a recent review of *Sport Management Education Journal* noted few graduate-focused studies (Miller et al., 2025).

When Jones et al. (2008) researched sport management curricular outcomes, sport marketing was listed as a needed aspect, while public relations and communication were not. Willett et al. (2017) joined "marketing and communications" as a singular outcome during a study of master's degree exclusive programs, finding at the time that only 67%

of master's programs listed by the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) contained a marketing and communication course. Since marketing and communication were not subdivided, and sport media were not mentioned at all, specific learning outcomes related to public relations were not studied. Pierce et al. (2022) noted that marketing courses were in more than 70% of sport management graduate programs, but public relations was not discussed either as its own learning outcome or as separate from marketing. This is key—although marketing and public relations may cross over in job function at times, the two industries serve separate and distinct purposes in sport (Stoldt et al., 2020).

The current Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) undergraduate accreditation curricular requirements, dated from 2022, have three content pillars, one of which is the "functions of sport management." Two of the four functions relate to public relations: "sports marketing, sales, and public relations" and "sports media and communications" (COSMA, 2024). The "sports marketing, sales, and public relations" curricular definition is as follows:

Includes promotions, sales, fundraising, advertising, branding and sponsorship. Strategies need to be created for individuals, teams and/or events, depending on the marketing needs and projections. Includes sport sales principles and philosophy, selling skills and techniques, steps in the sport selling process, prospecting, buyer motives, customer retention, closing the sale, careers in sport sales. (COSMA, 2024, p. 18)

The sport media and communications curricular needs are defined as follows:

Includes fostering two-way communication with key stakeholders. Such communications include, but are not limited to: social media, all aspects of media guides, press releases, websites, statistical archives, record keeping and game-day obligations. (COSMA, 2024, p. 18)

The COSMA accreditation requirements for the master's program note that all core areas of sport management must be accounted for and that at least half of the coursework for the degree comes from graduate-level course designations. The master's program requirements do not expound upon specific content areas, so the undergraduate foundations apply.

As prior research has shown, the sport management master's program is primarily pursued to move toward management positions in sport organizations (Willett et al., 2017). Therefore, presenting PR strategy and tactics would seem beneficial as such elements are key to the job functions within sport and to provide communication counsel within sport organizations. During a 2025 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) conference panel presentation, a panelist with a master's degree in sport management noted that her sport management master's degree did not have any marketing or public relations courses (L. Leck, personal communication, August 6, 2025). She further noted that, from the outset of her career in athletics, her roles have included marketing and communications, and she noted a knowledge gap in her program (L. Leck, personal communication, August 6, 2025).

Public Relations at the Graduate Level

Grunig (2013) and other public relations academics have long argued that the public relations function works most effectively when it is a separate management role that supervises and directs organizational communication and provides counsel to other leadership. The media relations and publicity work of the public relations function fall into specialized areas of the career, under the umbrella of public relations management (Grunig, 2013).

Public relations developed as an academic major in the latter part of the 20th century (Grunig, 2013). Given the mediated foundation of most public relations communication, the major is predominantly housed with journalism programs, although the major can also be found

in business schools and communication departments. Graduate programs for public relations also tend to be housed within journalism schools. Prior research on public relations graduate programs demonstrated some gaps in agreement on foundational degree requirements (Aldoory & Toth, 2000), yet consensus was found that the graduate degree was primarily for professional development, rather than a preparatory program toward doctoral education (Weissman et al., 2018).

Accreditations for graduate programs in public relations exist through both AEJMC and the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) educational affairs committee. Both are in conjunction with the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE). The CPRE noted five areas of emphasis in public relations graduate education in its 2012 report. The report explained that the areas should be emphasized whether in a public relations-centric degree or in, "a track, sequence, or concentration in a broader master's degree program" (Turk, 2012, para. 7). The areas include strategic PR management, business principles, PR theory and research methods, ethics, and global perspectives (Turk, 2012).

Researchers have noted that public relations, as a term in academia, tends to be in a moment of disruption itself; terms such as strategic communication and integrated marketing communications are just as likely to be used when learning outcomes still align with public relations (Weissman et al., 2018). Further, public relations master's degree program learning outcomes continue to evolve without uniformity due to modern converged media, problematizing boundaries of public relations' distinctions in curricula (Briones & Toth, 2013; Briones et al., 2016).

The current research views the landscape of COSMA-accredited sport management master's degree programs to learn how public relations is presented. Given the rise of sport management master's programs to address professional needs in the sport industry alongside the simultaneous evolution of public relations in graduate education, it is uncertain how

public relations is being taught in sport management master's programs. Since both COSMA and CPRE recommendations note that public relations receives adequate academic attention, such a study will help demonstrate the current landscape of public relations and expose gaps in curricula.

The following research question is posed:

RQ: How is public relations being taught in sport management master's programs?

Methods

This study used a two-step methodological approach to understand how public relations education appeared in sport management master's programs. To identify the universities for analysis, the directory of the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) was used. In total, 17 universities had their sport management master's programs accredited through COSMA. This formed the sample for the study.

The first step included a website analysis of each program and its curriculum (Table 1). Each of the 17 programs was viewed online via its website, and the course descriptions were analyzed to identify which courses specifically included and mentioned public relations curricula. For each program, the following elements were noted: university name, specific college/school of program, title of degree (MS, MA, etc.), a count of the PR courses, a list of the PR courses, and the email for the program's contact person (director or chair). Researchers reviewed the required components of public relations curricula, along with a sample website review, to ensure consistency in data collection.

The second step of the research included in-depth interviews. Through the website analysis, a faculty member or administrator from each of the 17 programs was identified and contacted for an interview. These contacts included graduate program directors, program coordinators, and chairs. Of those, five participants (including program directors and faculty) replied and participated in interviews, representing

various programs under business, health, and education programs, assuring a breadth of academic background. Interviews were conducted either via email or phone with the same interview guide. The questions were reviewed by the researchers in advance of the interviews and were approved by the primary investigator's Institutional Review Board. Responses were kept per IRB protocol, which included anonymity of responses and safekeeping of data.

The analysis of the website analysis and interview data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for thematic analysis. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data, searching for patterns and identifying themes.

Results

Program and Course Details

Results of the website analysis found that there was no distinct home for sport management master's programs (Table 1). Two programs were in colleges of health sciences, six were in colleges or schools that included education, five were in colleges of business, one was in a school of communication, one was in a college of applied studies, one was in sport science, and one was in professional studies.

The COSMA-accredited programs had varying titles, all with sport in their names. Table 2 shows the frequency of each. All programs were master's of science, with the exception of four programs—one was a master of education (MEd), one was a master of business administration (MBA), one was a master of sports leadership (MSLD), and one was a combined MBA/MSA (master of sport administration).

Table 1

*List of COSMA-Accredited Sport Management Master's Programs
Used as Sample*

University	College/Department	Degree Title	Degree Type
American Public University System	School of Health Sciences	Sport Management	M.S.
Arkansas State University	College of Education and Behavioral Sciences	Sport Administration	M.S.
Bowling Green State University	College of Education and Human Development	Sport Administration	M.S.
East Stroudsburg University	College of Business and Management	Management and Leadership in Sports Business	M.S.
Endicott College	School of Communications	Sport Leadership	M.S.
Liberty University	School of Sport Science	Sport Management	M.S.
Louisiana State University	College of Human Sciences and Education	Sport Management	M.S.
Northeastern University	College of Professional Studies	Sport Leadership	M.S.L.D.

Ohio University	College of Business	Sports Administration	M.S.A./M.B.A.
Shorter University	College of Business	Sport Management	M.B.A.
Troy University	Sorrell College of Business	Sport Management	M.S.
University of Central Missouri	Harmon College of Business and Professional Studies	Sport Management	M.S.
University of Indianapolis	College of Health Sciences	Sport Management	M.S.
University of Louisville	College of Education & Human Development	Sport Administration	M.S.
University of Southern Indiana	Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education	Sport Management	M.S.
Wichita State University	College of Applied Studies	Sport Management	MEd
Winthrop University	Riley College of Education, Sport, and Human Sciences	Sport and Fitness Administration [Sport Management Track]	M.S.

Table 2

Titles, Frequency, and Type of COSMA-Accredited Sport Management Programs

Degree Title Frequency	Degree Type
Sport Management (9)	M.S. (7), M.B.A. (1), M.Ed. (1)
Sport Administration (4)	M.S. (3); M.B.A./M.S. (1)
Sport Leadership (2)	M.S. (1), M.S.L.D. (1)
Sport and Fitness Administration (1)	M.S. (1)
Management and Leadership in Sport Business (1)	M.S. (1)

Of the 17 accredited programs, 10 had one public relations-centric course, based on information from the curriculum lists on the university websites. One program had two courses related to public relations. Six programs did not offer a specific PR course. Few of the courses listed public relations as a term specifically in the course description. There was no course title agreement among the programs. Each course title was different for each program. Table 3 demonstrates the variety of course titles.

Program directors were first asked where in the sport management program public relations, strategic communication, or organizational communication was taught. One director replied that students did not receive any course instruction in these areas and were sent to a separate public relations master's program when expressing interest in such an area. Another director noted that there was a combined marketing and public relations course for these subjects. A director from a program housed in a school of education noted that, "different courses deal with PR in different contexts. I teach administrative processes of intercollegiate athletics, where I cover PR in terms of risk management."

Table 3*Titles of Courses with Public Relations*

Course Titles
Sports Marketing, Promotion, and Public Relations
Sales and Promotion in Sport
Sport Communications
Sports Marketing and Public Relations
Sports Media Relations
Sport Public Relations
Strategic Communication
Sport Communication Theory and Practice
Strategic Sport Communication
Communication in Sport
Sport and Fitness Promotion

PR Learning Outcomes

Since it was possible that sport management programs covered public relations or strategic communication as embedded within other learning outcomes, program directors were also asked whether specific public relations strategies and tactics were taught. The list, modified for sport use from the PRSA list of course learning outcomes for PR education, included:

- Writing for media (press releases, media advisories, etc.)
- Sport-specific PR writing (game notes, media guides, etc.)
- Social media content creation
- Strategic campaign planning
- Event planning
- Branding
- Community and non-profit partnerships

One program director noted uncertainty about whether the concepts were taught in sport management courses. A second program director said that none of the concepts were taught. A program with a combined marketing and public relations course noted that all but event management were taught. A contact for one program responded similarly by stating that all of the learning outcomes mentioned were taught, while noting that event management was taught to a lesser extent than the other elements. In addition, this participant added that their class covered crisis communication, sport social responsibility, and the legal and ethical implications of public relations in sport-centric contexts.

External Program Partnerships

Athletic department partnerships are popular ways for graduate students to either work in an assistantship capacity or as applied learning, especially in sport management (Navarro et al., 2015), so a question was asked about whether the programs had formal athletic department partnerships. Most athletic department roles for graduate students include communication and stakeholder-centric work (Jowdy et al., 2014), and thus, a partnership would indicate some applied learning options that include public relations tactics. One program did not have an athletic department at all. Three other programs noted that while an official partnership might not be in place, there is a relationship that has led to applied learning opportunities for students and collaborative efforts. One program noted, “There is no official partnership with athletics, but a fair number of our graduate students are GAs for the department. And we also have full-time employees in the athletics department taking the graduate classes for the degree.” Another program director explained that the sport management program was a popular choice for students who were already hired as graduate assistants for the athletic department, so they often applied for admission to the program after earning the graduate assistantship.

Careers

Program directors were finally asked what sorts of jobs graduates tended to gravitate toward or move to after completing the degree. Each program director noted that graduates worked in a broad range of roles in the sport industry, and each mentioned that communication roles were popular. One program director explained, “Those specifically interested in the sport media and communication field usually have the combination of the two different degrees in their resume (e.g., undergraduate degree in journalism or communication or vice versa).” Another program director noted sport marketing was a popular choice, while another director mentioned athletic department management at the high school level, specifically, as many program graduates had military backgrounds and were transitioning into second careers. One participant mentioned that the shift reminded them of the earlier days of the program, noting that they perceived a decrease in interest surrounding communication-focused roles. Instead, they saw a more focused interest in event management and marketing. In addition, the participant stated:

We have more and more high school coaches that are in the program right now because they’re trying to position themselves for both the salary bump that comes with the master’s degree but also position themselves for an AD [athletic director] position down the line.

Discussion

The findings of this study uncovered the evolving nature of sport management master’s degrees and their inclusion of public relations in programs. Specifically, the analysis found inconsistencies in the inclusion and manner of public relations curricula within the accredited programs, which leads to ample opportunity for public relations educators and programs to expand offerings for students interested in sport industry careers.

Sport Management Master's Programs are Still Evolving, and PR Should be Included

There was representation of public relations in the majority of sport management master's programs but not all. Given the COSMA-stated outcome of professional communication and media knowledge as pillars of graduate-level education, this is concerning. Organizational communication for a media-centric industry such as sport requires an understanding of public relations and the media relations role, at a minimum. Internal public relations, such as within a sport organization's stakeholders (e.g., coaches, front office staff, players, vendors), is likewise foundational to sport management. Opportunities in many sport management programs are missed for students to learn public relations strategy, crisis communication, media relations tenets, and proper use of tactics. As COSMA recognizes that communication and media fundamentals are a separate learning area from marketing and sponsorship, we argue that every sport management master's program should include a separate public relations and strategic communication course.

While not all students within a sport management program will be interested in communication-specific careers, outcomes of effective public relations aid in overall organizational goals (Coombs, 2024; Coombs & Harker, 2022). As our interviews uncovered, many sport management master's candidates want to lead athletic departments or are currently part of athletic departments. By exposing students, including future athletic directors, to public relations learning outcomes such as crisis communication, writing for media, and strategic campaign planning, sport management programs can prepare students to more effectively manage organizational reputation. In addition, as Coombs (2024) stated, "fans are at the core of sport goals," and the relationship building that is central to the public relations function can strengthen fan engagement and identity. Athletic directors at the secondary school level, in fact, rarely have distinct

PR support as school systems may or may not have dedicated PR staff. An athletic director with an understanding of PR is an advantage in the modern mediated, NIL-infused secondary school athletic development landscape.

Additionally, when public relations is understood as a separate management function that is not marketing-focused or “under” marketing but mutually supportive (Gruning, 2013; Stoldt et al., 2020), sport management professionals will better understand how the public relations function uniquely assists with media representation. Modern sport organizations include an intense output of owned media, from podcasts to video production to in-house reporting and website development—which all fall under public relations. This is in addition to the social media content ubiquitous in modern sport, including for athlete promotion and name, image, and likeness (NIL) support. Thus, public relations, as required learning in sport management programs, provides a foundational understanding of the purpose behind media use.

Public Relations Graduate Educators Have Many Opportunities

The breadth of academic homes that sport management master’s degree programs lie within suggests that public relations is not a steadfast area of curricular strength. Faculty with public relations backgrounds are most likely to teach in journalism and mass communication programs or business schools. Therefore, faculty from the program’s academic home teaching public relations courses likely come from the academic background hosting the program. Schools of education, health sciences, and related programs will not have a strong presence of public relations faculty. While not necessarily a hindrance for public relations education, sport management master’s programs are likely relying on textbooks and outside expertise for teaching the PR curriculum. We suggest that this is an opportunity for public relations graduate faculty and educational oversight bodies. Sport management is a key major with an expressed media and

communications learning outcome—public relations academia can answer this call with specially-designed graduate-level PR resources, as well as tailored professional development opportunities for faculty teaching sport management PR master's courses.

A potential opportunity for journalism and mass communication programs is building a sport communication certificate or specialization that can be offered alongside the master's degree in sport management. This offering would allow students within a sport management master's program to gain more exposure to strategic communication and public relations without adding substantial time to their degree programs. A Google search of programs found graduate certificates at some institutions (i.e., Northwestern University, University of Kentucky, Purdue University, and Texas Tech University). The key to building this certificate as a stackable component for sport management master's degrees will require promotion that highlights its relevance and benefits to accomplishing organizational goals in a sport context. We note that this should be in addition to at least one public relations-centric course so that those with further interest can develop knowledge and skills in PR.

Accreditation in Public Relations: Expansion in Education

It is unknown if faculty members teaching in sport management master's programs have a background in PR themselves or have pursued formal accreditation, such as the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR). This was beyond the scope of this exploratory research; however, either encouraging public relations-experienced faculty or certification, such as the APR for current faculty, would be key for a public relations foundation in sport management programs.

Since many faculty in programs such as sport management already have graduate degrees, a separate degree in public relations/strategic communication does not seem necessary or practical. However, some sort of additional accreditation or education in public relations, through the

APR process facilitated by the Universal Accrediting Board (UAB) or a similar education certification, is a practical way for faculty to understand best practices in PR. The UAB's partner organizations, such as PRSA, are available throughout the U.S. and offer certification courses. PRSA notes that at least five years of PR experience is ideal for earning the APR, and we note here that the APR exam process includes leadership of a PR campaign—this would require an understanding of PR strategic campaigns. However, we further note that the APR process can easily be expanded or augmented to offer an educator option so non-PR faculty can be trained in campaigns, as well as the other aspects of PR unique to the industry.

While not currently formally available, certificate programs for PR are another option to assist faculty teaching PR courses in sport management master's programs. A "teaching PR" course designed for sport management would be another solution to ensuring PR best practices make it to sport management classrooms. As online certificate programs are readily modifiable, such an option may be ideal given the rapidly changing media landscape sport industry professionals work within.

Finally, we argue that sport management is representative of many other master's programs that may benefit from a clearer presentation of public relations. The master's of business administration, master's of public health, and master's of education administration are three programs that could benefit from a more distinct address of public relations, and while some programs may include this, many likely do not. Thus, such findings as discussed here could have cross-program applicability.

Limitations and Conclusion

While using COSMA-accredited programs for research was a good way to demonstrate parity in study, it limited the size of the study pool for this research. There were more than 220 U.S. sport management master's programs noted in 2017 research, although most are "in their infancy"

(Willett et al., 2017, para. 23), so the sample size of accredited programs is not representative of all programs. However, this parity criterion will allow this research to be replicated as accredited programs grow.

This research is based on program curricula and director interviews in order to provide a view of sport management from the institutional perspective. Graduates of sport management master's programs will offer a different perspective on whether they can articulate and employ public relations strategies and tactics. Follow-up research to learn program graduate competence and learning outcomes will help demonstrate how public relations education with programs helps or hinders employment opportunities within sport.

Public relations, in conclusion, has many opportunities to continue to demonstrate its unique and necessary role in organization management in graduate programs. As this research notes, the need for sport organizations to pay attention to public relations as a key foundation in reputation management, content creation, and stakeholder engagement is necessary. In fact, the need will only grow.

References

Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. L. (2000). An exploratory look at graduate public relations education. *Public Relations Review*, 26(1), 115-125.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111\(00\)00034-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111(00)00034-5)

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Briones, R. L., Shen, H., Parrish, C., Toth, E. L., & Russell, M. (2017). More than just a lack of uniformity: Exploring the evolution of public relations master's programs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 72(2), 154-167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695816649159>

Briones, R. L., & Toth, E. L. (2013). The state of PR graduate curriculum as we know it: A longitudinal analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 68(2), 119-133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695813481463>

Coche, R., & Haught, M. J. (2021). Sports media education's evolution: Integrating technology, branding and strategic media. *Teaching Journalism & Mass Communication*, 11(2), 27-36. <https://aejmc.us/spig/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2021/12/TJMC-11.2-Coche-Haught.pdf>

Coombs, W. T. (2024). *Why the need for strategic sport communication?* Routledge. <https://blog.routledge.com/education-and-training/why-the-need-for-strategic-sport-communication/>

Coombs, W. T., & Harker, J. L. (2021). *Strategic sport communication: Traditional and transmedia strategies for a global sports market.* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031161>

COSMA. (2024). *COSMA accreditation principles manual & guidelines for self-study preparation.* https://www.cosmaweb.org/uploads/2/4/9/4/24949946/accreditation_principles_february_2024.pdf

DeSensi, J. T., Kelley, D. R., Blanton, M. D., & Beitel, P. A. (1990). Sport management curricular evaluation and needs assessment: A multifaceted approach. *Journal of Sport Management*, 4(1), 31–58. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.4.1.31>

Emmons, B., Hull, K., & Petrotta, B. (2025). “The employment landscape has shifted massively, and we must shift with it”: A review of sports public relations courses within sports communication programs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 10776958251376410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958251376410>

Grunig, J. E. (2013). *Excellence in public relations and communication management.* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203812303>

Hancock, M. G., & Greenwell, T. C. (2013). The selection of a sport management major: Factors influencing student choice from a consumer-oriented perspective. *Sport Management Education Journal*, 7(1), 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.1123/smej.7.1.13>

Hull, K., Choi, M., & Kian, E. T. M. (2019). Examining the growth of sports communication programs in higher education through a questionnaire of program coordinators. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 74(4), 407-421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695819835044>

Jones, D. F., Brooks, D. D., & Mak, J. Y. (2008). Examining sport management programs in the United States. *Sport Management Review*, 11(1), 77-91. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1441-3523\(08\)70104-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1441-3523(08)70104-9)

Jowdy, E., McDonald, M., & Spence, K. (2004). An integral approach to sport management internships. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 4(4), 215-233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740408737478>

Knox, L. (2023, October 18). *Graduate enrollment slows, even as applications surge*. Inside Higher Ed | Higher Education News, Events and Jobs. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/graduate/2023/10/18/graduate-enrollment-slows-even-applications-surge>

L'Etang, J. (2013). Critical perspectives in sports public relations. In *Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication* (pp. 503-511). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203123485.ch50>

Miller, J., Pierce, D., Gregg, E. & Price, B. (2025). A content analysis of the *Sport Management Education Journal*: 2007-2023. *Sport Management Education Journal*, 19(2), 107-117. <https://doi.org/10.1123/smej.2024-0012>

Navarro, K., Haslerig, S. J., Bernhard, L. M., Houston, D. A., & Raphael, V. C. (2015). Best practices in higher education graduate programs: Preparing the next generation of intercollegiate athletics administrators. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 9(3), 214-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2015.1123003>

Pierce, D., Johnson, J., Miller, J., & Downs, B. (2022). Content analysis of sport management graduate degree programs in the United States. *Sport Management Education Journal*, 17(1), 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.1123/smej.2021-0031>

Rios, J. A., Randall, J., & Donnelly, M. (2019). An analysis of college choice information provided on graduate program websites: Implications for improving applicant diversity in educational measurement. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 38(4), 67-77. <https://doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/xbm3t>

Schwab, K. A., Dustin, D., Legg, E., Timmerman, D., Wells, M. S., & Arthur-Banning, S. G. (2013). Choosing sport management as a college major. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, 28(2), 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156X.2013.11949703>

Stoldt, G. C., Dittmore, S. W., Ross, M., & Branvold, S. E. (2020). *Sport public relations*. Human Kinetics.

Turk, J. (2012, Nov. 21). Commission on Public Relations Education sets standards for public relations master's degree education. <https://www.commissionpred.org/2012/11/commission-on-public-relations-education-sets-standards-for-public-relations-masters-degree-education/>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025a, April 18). *Occupational outlook handbook: Data for occupations not covered in detail*. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/data-for-occupations-not-covered-in-detail.htm#Arts,%20design,%20entertainment,%20sports,%20and%20media%20occupations>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025b, April 18). *Occupational outlook handbook: Public relations specialists*. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/public-relations-specialists.htm>

Weissman, P. L., Puglisi, G., Bernardini, D., & Graf, J. (2018). Disruption in PR education: Online master's degree programs in public relations and strategic communication. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 74(4), 371-387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695818819604>

What can you do with a sports management degree? 8 careers to consider pursuing. (n.d.). University of Minnesota Online. <https://online.umn.edu/story/what-can-you-do-sports-management-degree-8-careers-consider-pursuing>

Willett, J., Brown, C. & Goldfine, B. (2017). An examination of sports management masters' programs in the United States. *The Sport Journal*. <https://thesportjournal.org/article/an-examination-of-sport-management-masters-programs-in-the-united-states/>

Zeigler, E. F. (1987). Sport management: Past, present, future. *Journal of Sport Management*, 1(1), 4-24. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.1.1.4>