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ABSTRACT

Many aspects of public relations practice and public relations education are addressed in this paper. Topics dealt with include the roots of public relations practice, the services that public relations should provide, reasons for the failure of numerous corporations in the area of public relations, past and current trends in public relations education at the college level, concerns about the quality of public relations education, the need for business schools to encourage a broad understanding of public relations as a tool of management, and the formation by the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism of a Commission on Public Relations Education to make recommendations for the improvement of public relations education. The paper lists the purposes of the commission and notes that its ultimate goal is to contribute to the professionalization of public relations practice in our society. (GW)

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Notes for Remarks by J. Carroll Bateman,
President, Insurance Information Institute
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J. Carroll Bateman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

While it is possible to trace the roots of public relations practice a good way back into human history, public relations as a function of business management in the United States originated shortly after the turn of the present century. The date may be fixed in 1906, when the pioneering public relations man, Ivy Lee, opened his business news bureau to serve some major American industries.

Lee's operation was based on his concept that if American businessmen wished to gain the public's confidence, they would have to abandon their traditional ways of secrecy and provide information to the public about their policies and practices. Since that time, business public relations has evolved into a three-fold concept. From an ideal point of view, business public relations today should consist of three

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distinctive functions:

1. A continuing analysis of the social climate in which a particular business or other institution operates.
2. Counseling of management on the public relations aspects of its policies and practices.
3. Communication -- both ways -- between a particular management and its publics.

It should be unnecessary to point out that this three-dimensional type of public relations is not widely practiced. The shocking failures of numerous corporations -- among them, some of America's greatest corporations -- in the public relations arena in recent years are testimony to the fact that many contemporary managements do not understand the public relations function.

These failures in public relations have found major corporations in conflict with the public interest. Why has this happened? Obviously, there is a complex of causes for this situation. But I think there are two important contributing reasons:

1. The widespread misuse of public relations staffs by top-level corporate executives.
2. A serious dearth of public relations practitioners with the ability and experience to qualify as counselors to top-level management.

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As educators, you can help to correct this situation, as you endeavor to train tomorrow's generation of public relations executives.

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If public relations as a function of corporate management is some 75-years old in the United States, public relations education in our country is younger still. The first college-level course in public relations was established and taught by Edward L. Bernays a little more than 50 years ago, in 1923, at New York University.

Since that time, public relations courses in American colleges and universities have proliferated. A study* by Dr. Ray Heibert, dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Maryland, conducted for the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education in 1970, revealed that one or more courses in public relations are taught in 300 colleges and universities throughout the United States. Unfortunately, however, in well over 200 of these institutions there is only one introductory course in public relations. Only 87 have two or more courses. Only a handful of these colleges and universities have degree programs in PR at the bachelor's level, and of these only eight are accredited today by the American Council for Education in Journalism (the official

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(* This study, entitled "Trends in Public-Relations Education, 1964-1970", was published by the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education in 1971. It is available from Dr. F. C. Teahan, Education Director of the Public Relations Society of America, 845 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022. A listing of colleges with PR courses is also available from PRSA.)

accrediting agency for schools and colleges of journalism in the United States). (I should note that most public relations programs are conducted in schools and departments of journalism or communications.)

But the increase in the number of public relations courses and programs over the last 50 years has not been equalled by a comparable improvement in the quality of such education. Over the last five years, as the representative of the Public Relations Society of America on the American Council for Education in Journalism, I have been asked on numerous occasions to serve as a member of accreditation examination teams when a degree program in public relations is submitted for accreditation. My experience as a member of these ACEJ accreditation teams has led me to certain tentative conclusions:

1. That the existing courses in public relations are largely technique-oriented, and the students who are taking them gain little understanding of the public relations function in management. Few students gain a conceptual background of public relations principles, standards and ethics into which they can fit the utilization of the techniques.
2. There are no commonly accepted standards among PR educators for the teaching of the subject matter. Consequently the nature and the content of public relations courses vary widely.

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3. Frequently, there is duplication in technique training among the PR courses and certain journalism courses (which the students majoring in PR are also required to take).

4. In some institutions, there is insufficient flexibility for the student to combine his courses in public relations with courses in business administration or other special areas in which he may choose a PR career (ie., political science, public administration, international affairs, etc.).

Additionally, I might state that the experience of the Public Relations Society of America in its relations with the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (a professional body made up of the deans of schools and colleges of business in the United States) indicates that business schools all too frequently neglect the teaching of public relations as a tool of management. A recent survey by PRSA of business schools and colleges indicated that less than a handful of them require a course in public relations for their students majoring in business administration.

Incidentally, I have read with interest the paper presented earlier at this meeting by Professor Barbara Coe of New York University, in which she analyzes and compares the teaching of advertising in business

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schools as contrasted with the teaching of advertising in schools of journalism and communications. She points out that in schools of journalism and communications, students majoring in advertising are being prepared to become professional practitioners. On the other hand, students in schools of business who take courses in advertising need a different type of education in advertising because they do not expect to practice in the field. Instead they need to have a broad understanding of advertising as a tool of management. This same distinction applies -- or should apply -- in respect to the teaching of public relations in schools of business as compared to the teaching of public relations in schools of journalism or communications.

Others, like myself, have been disturbed by the lack of standards and the lack of quality in public relations education. Last year, following a discussion of this problem at the meeting of the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism (under the direction of Dr. Frazier Moore of the University of Georgia, 1973-74, president of the PR Division of AEJ), a commission of four prominent educators and three prominent practitioners was established to study this matter and come up with recommendations. Professor Scott Cutlip of the University of Wisconsin and I were named as co-chairman of this AEJ Commission on Public Relations Education.

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This commission has several purposes:

1. To determine the requirements for the professional practice of public relations -- not only for today but for tomorrow as well.
2. To determine the ways in which education to prepare people for public relations work can be improved, so as to meet the requirements for professional practice..
3. Through improvements in education, to effect improvements in the professional practice of public relations itself.
4. To strengthen and improve the ethical standards for the professional practice of public relations, particularly in respect to emphasizing the practitioner's responsibility to society at large, above and beyond his responsibilities to a particular client or employer.
5. To effect a greater degree of coordination between the degree-granting process of the educational institutions and the processes for admission to the Public Relations Society of America (or admission to the practice of public relations, if and when legal standards for admission are established).

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The first part of our study will be devoted to the curriculum for the student majoring in public relations at the bachelor's level.

To do this we shall have to determine the appropriate body of knowledge, possession of which is a prerequisite to professional practice. Then we shall have to examine how this body of knowledge is being transmitted today in educational institutions at the college level which offer degree programs.

We anticipate also making recommendations concerning indoctrination courses for students who are not majoring in public relations, but who are majoring in such other fields as business administration, public administration, etc., and who need to have an understanding of public relations as a tool of management.

We shall endeavor also to make recommendations concerning the relationship of the public relations program to the general education of the students in the liberal arts and humanities, and its relationship also to education in journalism or communications or other specialized fields.

Our ultimate goal lies far beyond the immediate concern for improving the teaching of public relations per se. We are concerned indeed with contributing to the professionalization of public relations practice in our society, in a way that will not only enhance the role of the public relations practitioner, but place his duty to society above

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his other responsibilities. It is only by doing this that ultimately we can create a true profession from what is now essentially a combination of an art and a craft.

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