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AUTHOR Neff, Bonita Dostal  
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ABSTRACT

A global approach to public relations education is needed as other countries look to the European Economic Community or elsewhere for their models of public relations. In the United States, the present state-of-the-art in public relations is more nascent in development than professionals acknowledge or even realize. Although academics in public relations do not usually present an integrated communication model, such a model stresses the variety of communication emphases developed or used by public relations professionals and the approaches taught by various disciplines. As documented in an earlier study, most of the developments in programs and curricula are occurring in communication departments. A survey of United States companies indicated that economic development is leading public relations firms down a path requiring knowledge of culture and language in addition to public relations. Calls for the establishment of a system for collecting case studies on international public relations need to be followed up with analysis by those who understand the communication process of current methodologies to further study the implications and nuances of the cases submitted. The role of culture in a global model is critical since cultural values affect the communication process. A communication model can only be strong when there is a solid understanding of key issues in specialty areas. The global model features: a communication emphasis which is integrated, a cultural experience, and a need for greater knowledge of specialty areas. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

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# Public Relations in an International Arena: Establishing a Global Model for Public Relations Education

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Bonita Dostal Neff, Ph.D.  
Valparaiso University  
Department of Communication  
and  
Public Communication Associates, President  
8320 Greenwood Avenue  
Munster, Indiana 46321-1813  
219 838-4428  
BITNET: NEFFGP@PUCAL

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Panel: Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations

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The most striking need for a global model in public relations education is summarized by Chris Bunting, chairman and chief executive officer of Continental PIR Communications in Toronto. Bunting states:

More and more of our business will be East-West.

Too much emphasis is placed on the opportunities for Canadian PR companies to grow in the U.S.

Granted, the American market has huge rewards and rightly deserves great efforts. But many of our clients have gone beyond a strictly North American view. They are growing into both Western and Eastern Europe as well as Asia, and expect us to be there beside them.<sup>1</sup>

A representative of the Irish consultancy group reinforced the global trend away from American public relations activities. The president of the consultancy association emphasized that once Irish public relations consultants thought the Americans would be their model but since the success of the European Economic

Community the attention has turned to Europe. It is in Europe where the public relations action will take place for Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

So not only is public relations going global but the shift is clearly away from American public relations activity. This comes at a time where public relations in the United States has not yet matured to an international model (only a few programs offer an international public relations focus). The interest in having a global model for teaching public relations is not yet a universally accepted premise.

As stated by Jan Brannstrom who is senior vice-president of the public affairs and communication for the Swedish Trade Council in Stockholm: "The first 17 months of the 1990's can, in many respects, be described as a 'revolutionary' phase" and described the quick move towards more open communication and the "radical changes in political systems."<sup>3</sup>

This paper establishes 1) the need for a global approach to public relations education, 2) the need to address concerns affecting the development of a global model for public relations curriculum, and 3) the need to establish the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of a global model for international public relations education.

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## The Needs and Concerns in Developing a Global Model in Public Relations

As mentioned, public relations has moved toward an international emphasis in agency work with the United States no longer being the central focus for public relations activity. Economic and social forces have given the East and European public relations needs a dominant place in international development. Since the political revolutions of the 90's have opened communication possibilities, public relations is flourishing beyond the borders of the U.S.

Constructing a global model for educational programs to meet these changes is a challenge. Although practitioners look to non-American countries for exciting public relations opportunities, most countries look to the United States for the educational models in public relations.

The British academics, for example, stated in their presentation at the International Communication Convention in Dublin 1990 that their curriculum was modeled after the American programs. Similarly Canadian teachers utilize American textbooks supplementing their own local governmental and cultural customs.

An examination of the U.S. academic programs in public relations (undergraduate and graduate) reflect little interest in establishing a "Global Model" for public relations education. Moreover, the few American academic programs addressing an international focus have narrowly defined public relations as mass communication.

### Public Relations Programs in the United States.

In the United States the present state-of-the-art in public relations is more nascent in development than professionals acknowledge or in some instances realize. The major fields which are producing the students, the scholars, and the scholarship are barely talking with each other much less listening to each other. Recent articles published fail to mention the recent developments in other disciplines involved with public relations education. The lack of awareness about what is happening in public relations is a major sign the professionals have yet to communicate with those in their own profession.<sup>4</sup> And as Sir Peter Ustinov, actor, noted at the recent IPRA Congress in Toronto: "we have more to learn from each other than to teach each other."<sup>5</sup> This subtle but critical shift in perception is the key to whether public relations matures and survives as a discipline of importance here in the states much less be a model for other countries.

### Where Are Public Relations Programs Housed?

Public relations was initially located in departments of journalism. Since these early formalized academic beginnings, public relations has evolved in other departments outside of journalism, including departments of communication (includes speech communication) and departments of mass communication. Other departments are rarely represented but single public relations courses dominate the offerings in departments of business and departments of English and, of course, the most recent development--the rare example of a public relations department as an entity in itself.

The initial surge of scholarship came from a few public relations academics housed in journalism departments. These journalism based scholars sought to distance themselves from the publicity model. Instead their research contributions stress the organization (management emphasis) as in systems theory. Now two aspects of public relations as a journalism model have emerged: publicity (as in print) and systems theory in respect to management.

These scholars stress it is through "understanding" that public relations is accomplished. Although "understanding" has not been tested and is criticized as not being realistic, this is a shift from most of their journalism colleagues who still practice publicity. It is important to note, however, the shift to management is viewed here as a shift to another "skill level" or "technician level." There does not seem to be evidence that a "management" approach has assured public relations practitioners a place in the decision making process of organizations.

A larger group of scholars and public relations teachers have emerged from communication (includes speech communication). Although prolific in research, their efforts to research specifically public relations areas is relatively new. The rhetorical models, the interpersonal models, and the organizational models have been extensively researched in the discipline and serve as a vast resource. Public relations has grown quickly in communication departments to the largest number of programs and students in public relations. The initial models focused on rhetorical theory. Around 1987 a theory conference was held at Illinois State University (a scholarly upper level reader, Public Relations Theory, was published by 1989). Neff presented a newer communication model for public relations stressing creativity. Based on an intra/interpersonal model of communication in contrast to an organizational model, the model stressed the development of a sense of community which is a broader conception than the organizational approach. Leadership rather than supervisory skills were key to communication

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effectiveness. These "leaders" not "managers" were the candidates for top level decision-making positions.

The Synergistic or creative model in contrast to the understanding model operated in different domains with different applications. The understanding model is appropriate for negotiations, arbitration, and other conflict situations where the rules for communication are agreed upon. The Synergistic model was more appropriate to decision making where communication was established. Thus communication for leadership offered the opportunity for public relations professionals to play a key role in communication. The Synergistic model is an enabling process empowers communicators to build networking which develops a sense of community.

In sum, the most important aspect of the integrated communication model is, whether acknowledged or appreciated, public relations is viewed as operating through communication. Adding the communication academics (including speech communication), the communication model is further expanded other communication approaches such as intra/interpersonal, a variety of organizational communication, public communication, and mass communication. Mass communication becomes more strongly oriented towards a broadcasting emphasis, primarily production. However, the rhetorical, intra-interpersonal areas found in communication are rarely recognized by those who come from a journalistic background. Academics in public relations do not usually represent an integrated communication model. The model presented here illustrates the need for basing public relations education on a global model integrating the various approaches to communication. This suggests there must be a greater effort for interdisciplinary training within the universities.

An integrated communication model stresses the variety of communication emphases developed or used by the public relations professionals and the approaches taught by various disciplines. Although it must be noted that not every discipline acknowledges the existence of or exhibits an understanding of the variety of possibilities in communication. An overview of the practices and teaching of these communication approaches has been documented in a nationwide study of public relations courses in the United States. The review of 3,201 university and college catalogs documents where the growth and development has occurred in public relations. The following graph identified 580 undergraduate departments offering 1,275 undergraduate public relations courses.<sup>6</sup> This breakdown of public relations courses offered provides the best documented clue to the direction of public relations curriculum development on the departmental level.

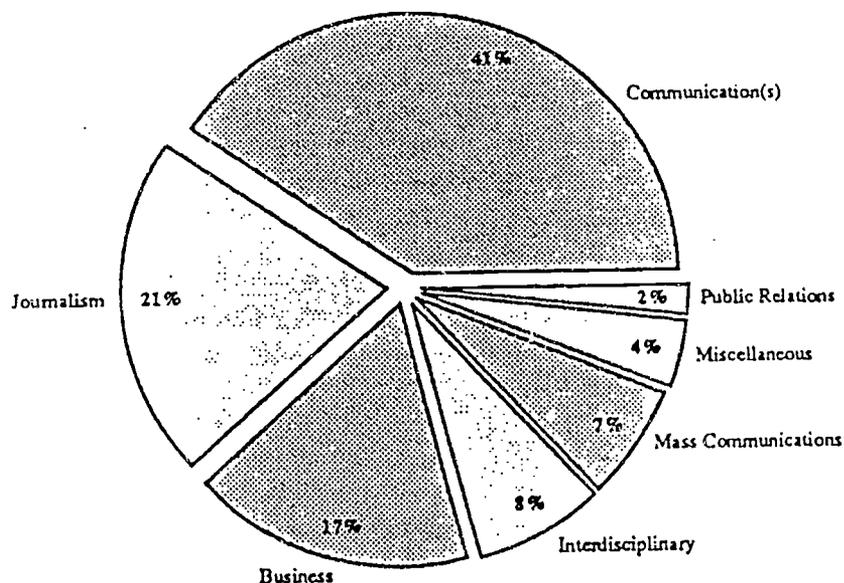
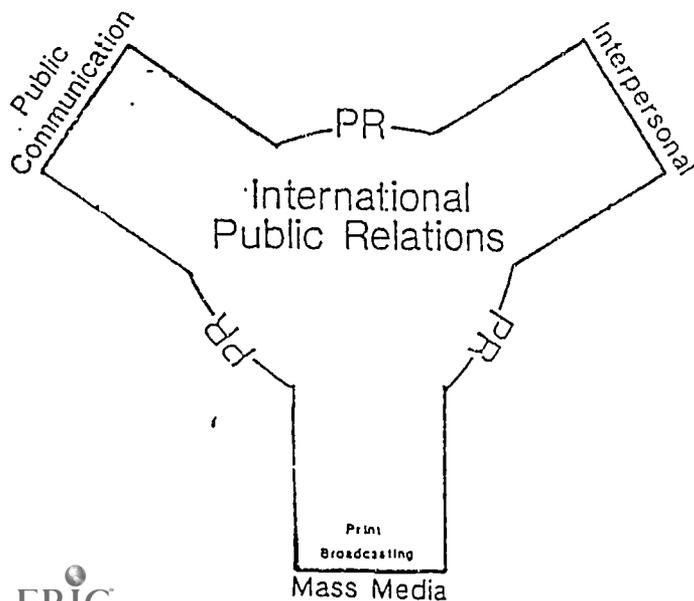


FIG. 9.1. Departments offering public relations.



The graph compartmentalizes each discipline and this reflects often the reality of the relationships. The journalists practice publicity, the reoriented journalists focus on organization communication, and it is in the communication departments (including speech communication) where more than one communication approach is used.<sup>7</sup> However, the communication

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emphasis remains a constant and illustrates that the departments which produce most of the public relations courses operate within a communication model. However, there is one other item of interest.

A few business/management departments frequently offer a course in public relations. The course does not treat public relations as a communication model. In fact, public relations is viewed often as "imagemaking" for a particular type of business like banking but the means for creating this image through communication is not included in the college course description. Business departments philosophically have not demonstrated an understanding of the process of public relations.

As documented in a survey identifying public relations curriculum, most of the developments in programs and curriculums is occurring in communication departments (includes speech communication). These departments are based more on the interpersonal, organizational, rhetorical, and broadcasting aspects of communication. In fact, these departments hold the greatest number of production courses in broadcasting and now the largest number of students and courses in public relations. The high level of research and theoretical training available (as in contrast with journalism departments) makes communication departments a strong graduate training site for public relations and, therefore, less of a technical approach.

There are a few examples of international public relations courses in mass communication departments. However, public relations is viewed as a media emphasis and this seems to be a throwback to the publicity model. Plus if we are talking about a "Global Model" in public relations, many third world countries do not have access to media and many undemocratic countries have the media controlled by the government. Please note there may be good reasons for government control of media. In some African countries, for example, the rivalry among tribes would make it impossible for a broadcasting station to be operated without continual warfare. To avoid conflict the government controls the broadcasting system. Initially a communication dominated model was proposed as the basis for developing a global model for public relations education. Recent developments point to some need to modify this approach. While the communication emphasis remains, there is some need to develop skills which assist the professional to gain access to information and processes within a organization. Recent developments in public relations, especially agency work, suggests another layer of skill development must be attended to.

The Role of Noncommunication Training in Public Relations. In a recent presentation at the IPRA

Congress in Toronto, Thomas Mosser, President, of Burson-Marsteller for the USA mentioned his concern for losing the communication focus in public relations. In a later follow-up telephone conversation, Mosser indicated that the new recruits for executive training in his firm are MBAs without a public relations background. The reasoning for this is the public relations graduates seem not to be able to handle the business aspects of public relations and recent international growth in economic development is requiring greater business expertise. It is Mosser's hope that these new future executives for Burson-Marsteller can "pick up" the communication aspect.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this conversation I deliberately selected 3 textbooks for the 2 sections of senior level research courses in communication in an effort to address this potential problem. Now a textbook by Dozier and Bloom called Using Research in Public Relations: Applications to Program Management is required. However, to assure the communication emphasis another text called Communication Research: Strategies and Sources by Rubin, Rubin, and Piele will supplement the Dozier and Bloom book. Then to address the concern about the inability for public relations graduates to translate business information, the text Social Research for Consumers by Earl Babbie is added to the textbook list.<sup>9</sup> If 3 texts seem like overkill, perhaps what should be noted is the heavy demand to produce a public relations graduate who is communication savvy but also oriented to business. This is the student that will survive in future public relations markets. Can these communication-business oriented students hold their own against the MBAs? Time will only tell. More research and reoriented textbooks are needed to meet the challenge. My experience and research tells me that the business schools have yet to discover communication and that this has always hindered their development. Business schools are not likely to be quick about adapting to this and my guess is their students (primarily MBAs) will not find it easy to adapt to communication orientations and will be weak professionals in the public relations arena. Meanwhile, it is a challenge to the liberal arts and sciences to develop strong graduate programs in public relations to counter the impression that a MBA degree is the wave of the future. Perhaps also there will be need to recruit and screen for better prepared students for the public relations profession.

Another set of data focusing on the EEC '92 (European Economic Community) public relations activities highlights some of the issues put forth by Mosser. The public relations agency responses to a telephone survey on job qualifications for Europe's 1992 hiring process is surprising.<sup>10</sup> The most frequent

mention in response to job qualifications was a candidate who knew what public relations was (who would think this would be a problem). Yet the respondents noted a variety of people apply for public relations positions from legal, business, or social science areas and do not have a clue to what public relations is. The second highest, first-mentioned, qualification dropped to 50% of the first highest qualification mentioned—that of having international or cultural understanding. Close to knowledge of a culture was a tie with good communication and business experience (interesting these two concepts go hand in hand). Now there may be a difference in hiring people who are to be part of an executive program for developing top leaders and those candidate for jobs who are expected to pick up a specific assignment immediately.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the new MBA can be tolerated in their ignorance of public relations and communication during a long training period. However, it cannot be stressed enough that the entire group of new potential leaders for Burson-Marsteller are MBAs first and learners of the public relations process second. Mosser also stressed that no executive will ever work and live solely in the United States. Executives will be expected to have some working experience abroad.

If you take the top three responses from each agency then you have the top cluster of needs: international relations-culture, business experience, public relations knowledge, and language (a specific skill closely related to the idea of culture). This survey of U.S. agencies confirms that economic development is leading the public relations firms down a path requiring a new blend of skills. While public relations knowledge is paramount, it is not enough. Knowledge of language and culture has intertwined with public relations and business to form a triad of expertise now expected. Truly the expectation from public relations professionals has grown considerably. The global emphasis is taking on dimensions which must be represented in a global model of public relations education and that includes acknowledgement that communication operates in a cultural milieu.

## Global Model Adds Cultural Dimension

The Educators Group for the International Public Relations Association met in Toronto during the Congress sessions. The Educators passed a resolution establishing a system for collecting case studies from member countries. There seems to be much enthusiasm for this data.

There has not been any mention of further analysis once these cases have been collected. There

seems to be two major directions for this project and include:

1. An analysis of current methodologies available to further study the implications and nuances in the case studies submitted. Such a thoughtful process should reveal much of what the intercultural/multicultural scholars have discovered. For those who look at the role of culture, systems theory has had very disappointing results. Public relations scholarship has largely been focused on systems theory and unfortunately we may find similar disappointing results.<sup>11</sup> Systems theory just simply may not be a powerful way to examine the public relations process. Systems theory may describe but may not be very useful in explaining what is happening. This suggests that the thrust of current published scholarship in public relations related journals/annuals may not be as useful as once thought.

Perhaps the methodology of collecting data will reveal certain biases. If case studies are created through interviews, surveys, or an examination of documents, then there may be one story to tell. If a case study is documented through the ethnographic approach, then there may be an entirely different outcome.

Focus groups may or may not be as useful for public relations. Focus groups may fall short of assisting in the understanding of the communication process. In fact, the focus group at best may simply reflect the communication habits of the group being studied.

It seems like public relations has a lot of thoughtful homework on the role of research. The sooner the field opens up to exploring a variety of research approaches, the sooner the field will have a chance to develop its own meaningful parameters.<sup>12</sup>

2. Case studies should be analyzed by those who not only have an understanding of the communication process (in the broadest sense) but also those who have a sensitivity to the multicultural dimension.

The model at this point is connected by the cultural dimension. Cultural values affect the communication process greatly, for example. In Japan, the contact between the media and the organization is very formal. None of the face-to-face confrontation experienced in the United States is expected. Those kinds of matters are taken care of in interpersonal and private kinds of situations. The media and organizational contact is very polite and routine. Investigative journalism is hardly the emphasis for the Japanese media.

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Public relations can only truly develop in a democratic society. True the situation lately has resulted in a revolution of communication in a number of countries caught in the cold war situation. Now the potential for public relations to develop is greater than ever. The increased economic exchange is adding pressure to the need for public relations to enter the market. Yet the cultural differences remain and the sensitivity to the use of words, the use of visuals, the cultural taboos are all a critical aspect of the public relations effort. Gift giving alone can be very dangerous. For example, a gift of a clock in China is a bad sign. How special events happen or can happen is often tied closely to the cultures involved.

Probably even more important is the issue of ethics. Here the marriage of ethics and culture is crucial. Ethics is a variable which changes from society to society. Being sensitive to what the ethics are in a country may make a critical difference in the success of the public relations effort.

Germany, for example, allows bribes to be tax deductible. There will be very different experiences for a public relations professional in a German culture. How one deals with all these variances needs to be considered not only as a communication matter but also as a cultural entity.

So the model now has a new level of understanding included--that of culture. The communication model below highlights the role of culture as connected through all the approaches to communication.

In fact culture may be the item which makes the communication model work. The study of culture serves as the key basis for developing a communication model in public relations. Yet if one were to review the public relations curriculum, very little if any of one's study will be of multicultural issues. If one were to review the textbooks, little information is given on the international and multicultural dimensions of communication. True there are listings of international public relations networks but there is not a thorough discussion of cultural issues in the textbooks. Culture, unfortunately, is not a critical dimension in the program of study for public relations students in the United States.

## Specialties in Noncommunication Expertise: A Reality for Employment

Knowledge of the communication process in its broadest definition from a multicultural point-of-view is now not enough preparation for the professional. The emergence of a world economy, easy transportation, fast communication and translation along with major societal concerns of the environment and changing values has affected the communication process greatly. Just note how Sweden is radically adjusting their economy to accommodate the membership expectations in the EEC. Sweden has described these drastic changes as the following:

It has dawned on Sweden that joining the European Community means the "Swedish model" is out; increasing growth, along German lines, is in....

One visible sign: the government's plan to make inflation its top priority. This will mean defending currency exchange rates, letting unemployment rise and slowing if not cutting government expenditures--a major change from Sweden's old ways....

How will Swedes deal with the pain that accompanies a transition to a hard market economy? The emphasis on employment and social spending of the past has ill prepared these 8.4 million people for an unprecedented but expected unemployment rate of 5%, maybe even 6%. The growth rate of money wages that has hovered around 9.5% will have to fall in line with the European average of 6.5%. And in the long run, Sweden will need to cut government spending. Now roughly 60% of GNP, mostly for one of the world's most comprehensive social spending programs that

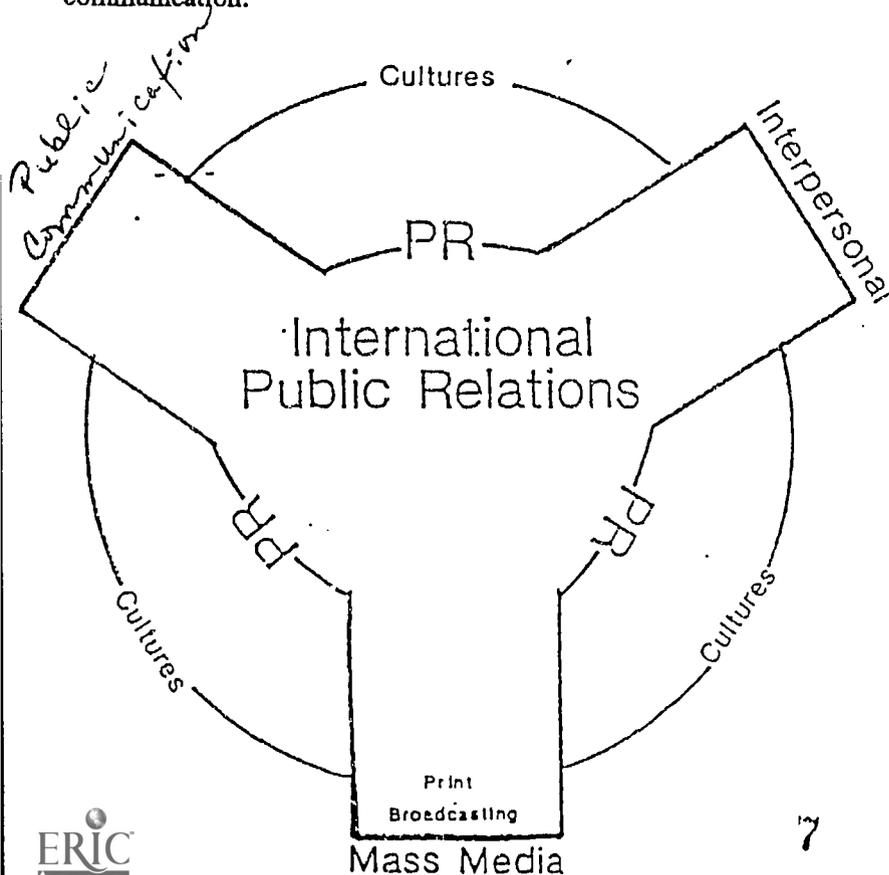


figure will have to move toward Germany's 47%. Achieving that will be the real test for Sweden.<sup>13</sup>

Public relations professionals need to monitor these situations. This information should serve as the basis for developing a communication plan in a particular culture. But before one believes that business is the answer, let us look at the realities of change. Change is not just economically driven. Even the EEC has ramifications beyond economic development. The political and cultural dimensions accompanying these changes are just as profound. One of my academic friends living in Sweden is already discussing the inability to adjust to these changes. In fact, a possible move to the Middle East may be the answer for her family. The economic adjustments will be avoided but the cultural and political changes will be more dramatic.

Perhaps before one concludes business should be a public relations expertise, other areas of concern should be examined. Issues and problems have legal and environmental considerations. Intertwined are economic realities. What public relations professionals need to realize is that a communication model of the public relations process is critical especially from a cultural point-of-view. But this communication model can only be strong when there is a solid understanding or access to the understanding about key issues whether that expertise is legal, environmental, management, agricultural, economic, or social. This may mean there will be more public relations specialists. But the noncommunication expertise will be looked for in any public relations candidate applying for a job in the future.

Now the global model for public relations education has come full circle. As a communication model grounded in culture there is also a commitment to develop one's own specialty.

But for a public relations professional to be effective, one must not forget the ultimate effectiveness is in utilizing the communication process effectively. Information will help to make the communication process more effective, but the ultimate focus or work will be in facilitating the communication process. If the communication emphasis is not the key to the public relations effort, then there will not be a transformation of ideas.

## Summary

The global model for public relations education has several features. These features include:

1. A communication emphasis which is integrated. The model demonstrates the communication possibilities which have been developed by the various disciplines involved in public relations. Perhaps this is why public relations has not developed to any degree in business and ultimately will never be a home to public relations. It further points out that those disciplines who have a communication focus need to "communicate" with each other and "learn" more about the potential of their expertise.

2. A cultural experience. The model clearly identified the cultural impact of today's communication systems. The economic revolutions, the ease of transportation, the world concerns about the environment, all have made the world much smaller. Cultures are mixing at a faster rate than ever. Public relations professionals are expected to keep pace with changes.

The research in intercultural/multicultural areas should be of use to those in public relations. The weaknesses in multicultural research should be noted as a possible concern for those in public relations.

Ethics is intertwined in the multicultural level. Ethics cannot be discussed except in a multicultural sense. This may mean nearly all public relations texts should be revised and curriculum modified to include a multicultural emphasis.

3. The need for a greater knowledge of specialty areas cannot escape notice. In a sense this moves the profession closer to a medical model. Here an immense amount of specialty information is required. Similarly, the public relations professional will be responsible for a vast amount of information. This may lead to greater specialization. Some may become more knowledgeable in the legal areas, other in environmental concerns, or business, or health. Specialty acumen, not just business, is now the requirement for the survival of a public relations professional.

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